INTERVIEW: AMANDLA STENBERG & MANNY JACINTO

THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE | ISSUE 227

STAR WARS INSIDER

Exclusive
An All-New *The High Republic* story!
Fiction!

Got Blue Milk!

Is it more than just the galaxy's favorite beverage?

Creature Comforts

Inside the amazing Lucasfilm Creature Shop

Return of a Jedi

Born to Rebel: The Story of Ezra Bridger!

REX & ROLL

CAPTAIN REX'S TOP 10 BATTLES

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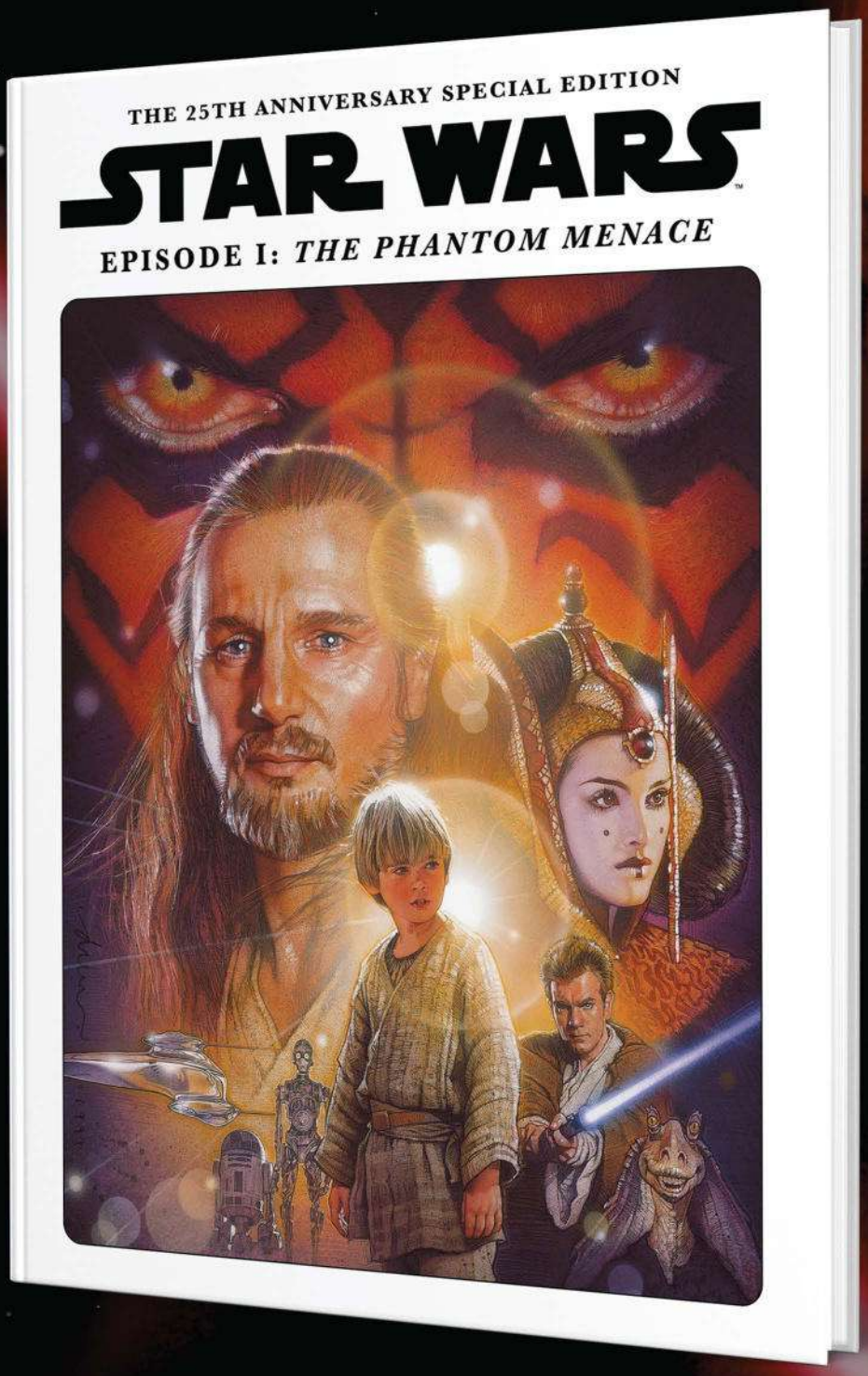
CELEBRATE 25 YEARS SINCE THE RELEASE OF *STAR WARS: THE PHANTOM MENACE*!



Return to 1999 and relive the global excitement ahead of the release of the first of the *Star Wars* prequels! Lavishly illustrated with stunning photography, art from the Lucasfilm Image Archives, and vintage interviews from the cast and crew!

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A MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR

"Hello There!"

Did Sith Lords drink blue milk? And if they did, could lactose intolerance have been the surprising cause of their extreme hatred towards everything and everyone—including their very own master or apprentice (delete as appropriate)? Was lactose even a thing in the *Star Wars galaxy*? It probably doesn't matter, but this is the kind of thought that wanders uninvited through an editor's mind (well, *this* editor anyway!) when thinking about prospective features for each issue. Consequently, for this edition of *Insider* I found myself commissioning an in-depth look at the science behind blue as a food color in the galaxy far, far away and closer to home. With recipes! Not once does the word "lactose" come up, so I'm still none the wiser. (But there *had* to be something bugging those grumpy Sith, right?!)

Star Wars: The Acolyte set out to explore the dark side from a much less whimsical perspective, and this issue we speak to Amandla Stenberg (who played twin sisters Mae and Osha) and Manny Jacinto (Qimir) about their roles in the hit Disney+ series. We also take a tour of Lucasfilm's Creature Shop at Pinewood Studios with creature effects designer Neal Scanlan, who is on a mission to train young apprentices of his own at the state-of-the-art facility.

Along with exploring the heroic exploits of Ezra Bridger and Captain Rex, we look at how some of the oldest planets from the saga have been expanded in the current era of *Star Wars* storytelling. We also welcome a special guest writer to our ongoing series of *The High Republic* short fiction—award-winning author Alyssa Wong.

I advise you grab a glass of chilled bantha milk and get reading. I have spoken.

Christopher Cooper
Editor

MEET THE CONTRIBUTORS...

Alyssa Wong
@crashwong
Nebula Award-winning novelist and games writer Alyssa has been behind Marvel Comics' *Star Wars: Doctor Aphra* series since 2020.

Jay Stobie
@StobiesGalaxy
Writer, media consultant, and Wookiee fan, Jay is a regular *Star Wars Insider* contributor, and commentator for many sci-fi outlets.

Melissa T. Miller
@melissatruth
Scientist and science writer Melissa visits Comic-Con every year to purchase new *Star Wars* paraphernalia for her pet dog.

Mark Newbold
@Prefect_timing
A writer for U.K. sci-fi magazine *Starburst* and a *Star Wars Insider* contributor since 2006, Mark is an Honorary Friend of the 501st Legion.

Amy Richau
@amyrichau
Amy is a regular contributor to StarWars.com, and is the author of *Star Wars: I Love You, I know: Lessons in Love and Friendship.*

Harvey Hamer
@TDDBooks
A British science-fiction and fantasy author with an interest in history and mythology, Harvey has a "small" *Star Wars* and LEGO collection.

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THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE
STAR WARS INSIDER

ISSUE 227

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SPECIAL THANKS TO
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TITAN MAGAZINES
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Curtis Circulation Company
U.S. Bookstore Distribution / The News Group
U.S. Direct Sales / Diamond Comic Distributors
U.K. Distribution / Marketforce

SUBSCRIPTIONS
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Canada subscriptions / 818-487-4575
U.K. subscriptions / 01778 392085
email: swmag@servicehelpline.co.uk

For more info on advertising contact
adinfo@titanemail.com

(USPS 003-027) (ISSN 1041-5122)

Star Wars Insider is published eight times per year (January/Feb, Mar/April, May/Jun, July/August, September/October, November/December) by Titan Magazines, a division of Titan Publishing Group Limited, 144 Southwark Street, London SE1 0UP.

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PUBLISHER'S U.S. AGENT
2819 Rosehall Lane, Aurora, IL 60503. Periodicals Postage Paid at Aurora IL and at additional mailing offices.

POSTMASTER
Send address changes to Titan Publishing, *Star Wars Insider*, PO Box 147, Lincolnshire, IL 60069
U.S. subscriptions $49.99 per year; Canada $64.99 and U.K. £31.99.
U.S. edition printed by Quad.

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STAR WARS INSIDER

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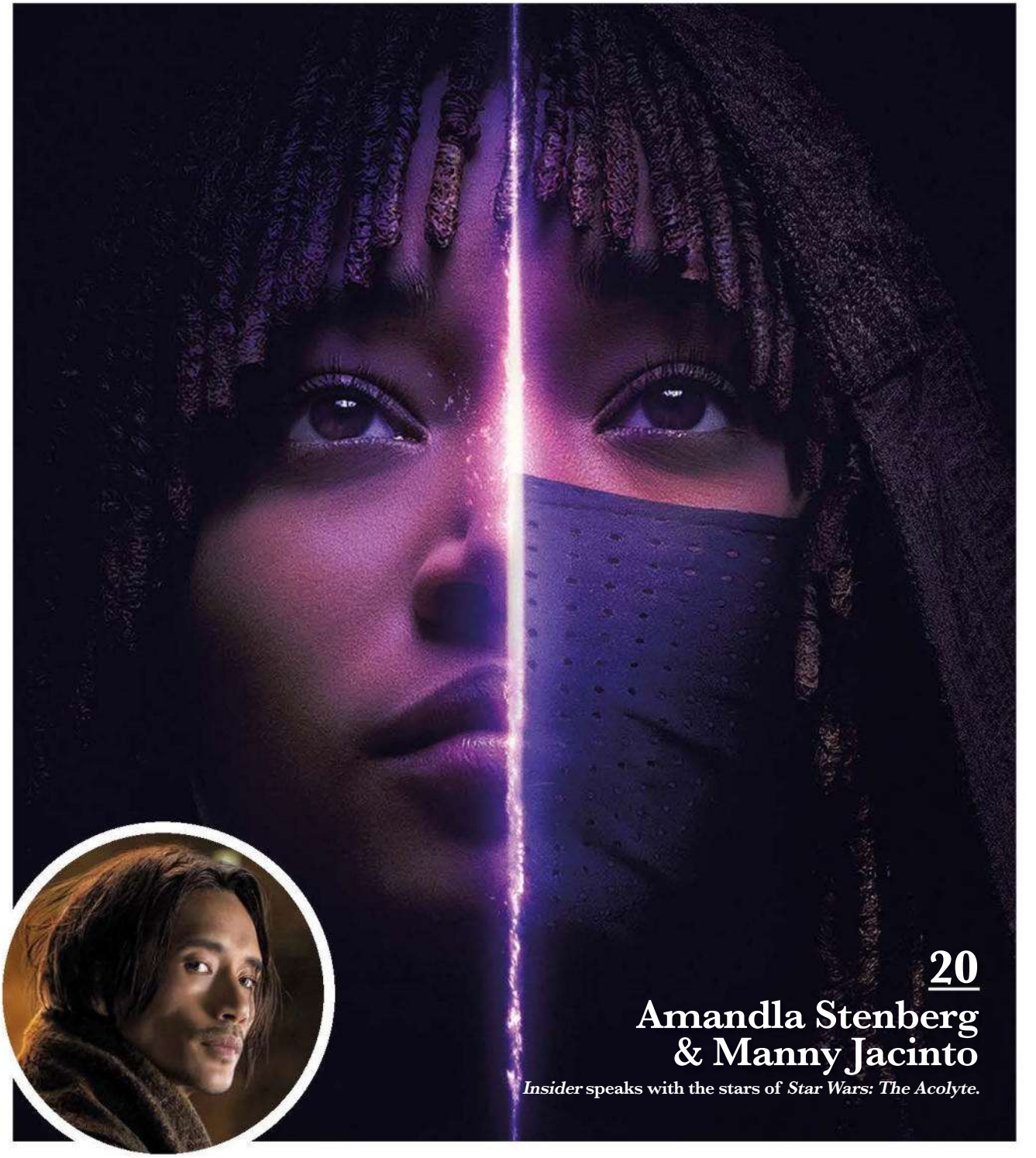

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Return Of The Young Jedi

The fun series for younglings is back

Younglings rejoice! *Star Wars: Young Jedi Adventures* is back with a second season of fun adventures for Kai Brightstar, Lys Solay, Nubs, and a brand new Padawan by the name of Wes Vinik.

The new season launched on Disney+ and Disney Jr. on Wednesday, August 14, and sees Kai, Lys, and Nubs continue their training with Jedi Masters Zia Zanna and Yoda while they take on bigger missions than ever before and explore the galaxy, helping those in need. The first batch of episodes will be followed by the season's second half in early 2025, and a digital series of short animations, *Fun with Nubs*, is also available to stream now on StarWarsKids.com.

"We're thrilled to invite fans of Kai, Lys, Nubs, and Nash back for Season Two of *Star Wars: Young Jedi Adventures*," says showrunner and executive producer Michael Olson. "This season, our heroes face thrilling challenges, welcome spirited Padawan Wes Vinik and a new class of younglings to Tenoo, and reunite with friends from across the galaxy. Together, they'll learn important lessons about friendship, compassion, and overcoming fears. This heartfelt and action-packed season will be a thrilling ride, and we can't wait to share it with you."

Star Wars: Young Jedi Adventures stars JeCobi Swain as Kai Brightstar, Juliet Donenfeld as Lys Solay, Dee Bradley Baker as Nubs, Emma Berman as Nash Durango, Trey Murphy as Taborr/Cyrus Vuundir, Nasim Pedrad as Master Zia Zanna, Gunnar Sizemore as Wes Vinik, and Piotr Michael as Master Yoda.

The series is produced by Lucasfilm in collaboration with Wild Canary for Disney+ and Disney Jr. Michael Olson is the showrunner and executive producer, with Lucasfilm's James Waugh, Jacqui Lopez, and Josh Rimes also executive producers. Elliot M. Bour is the supervising director and co-executive producer; and Lamont Magee is consulting producer.

Here Come The Outlaws

Open-world *Star Wars* videogame arrives

***Star Wars*: Outlaws, the long-awaited videogame from Massive Entertainment, Ubisoft, and Lucasfilm Games, is on sale August 30, available on Xbox Series X|S, PlayStation 5, and PC.**

Set between the events of *Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back* and *Star Wars: Return of the Jedi*, players will step into the role of Kay Vess, a clever scoundrel navigating life in the galactic underworld who is planning one of the biggest heists the Outer Rim has ever seen. Speaking to StarWars.com, Julian Gerighty, creative director of Ubisoft's Massive Entertainment, described the game's lead character as, "struggling to survive. She's messy. She's stumbling into trouble. She's a long way from being perfect." However, Vess is resilient and tenacious, which are integral traits to the experience of playing the game. "Kay Vess is not an incredible gunslinger when we find her. She's not a pilot. All of those things happen because she throws herself at problems; she goes into it. She's a little bit reckless," Gerighty explained. "That, for me, was super important because of the relatability of it. We should have video game characters and characters in books and movies that are absolutely not perfect, who live through their good qualities, and also their faults and their actions, too. I think that the characters are really the underpinning of everything that is *Star Wars*. That's why we're especially proud to bring Kay, Nix, and ND-5 to life in this."

Discover more about *Star Wars*: Outlaws at **ubisoft.com**.

Astromechs Ahoy!

Creative fun for droid builders

With the LEGO® *Star Wars* Creative Play Droid Builder set (75392), fans from age 9 and up can piece together LEGO brick versions of some of the galaxy's most famous astromechs, including R2-D2, Chopper (C1-10P), QT-KT, and R5-J2.

More fun can be had customizing each droid with brick-built droid accessories such as a cowboy hat, baseball cap, moustache, and even a duck. The set has 1,186 pieces, and features interchangeable parts that include rotating heads and legs so you can configure your own droid designs. An exclusive LEGO *Star Wars* 25th anniversary minifigure of Young Princess Leia and her droid Lola (L0-LA59) from *Star Wars: Obi-Wan Kenobi* completes the set. Priced $99.99, the Creative Play Droid Builder is available now on **LEGO.com**.

Clone wars cards

Deckbuilding game expands

Launching in August 2024, Fantasy Flights Games are growing the galaxy of *Star Wars: The Deckbuilding Game* with an all-new *The Clone Wars* Edition, featuring 90 cards that pit the forces of the Republic against the ever-growing scourge of the Separatists.

The easy-to-learn tabletop card game involves players choosing a side, strengthening their decks, and battling to destroy their opponent's bases. *The Clone Wars* edition can be played as a standalone game or combined with the original edition to build an even more expansive experience. Go to **fanatasyflightgames.com** to learn more about the game.

PRODUCTION DIARY

Star Wars movies and television programs coming from a galaxy far, far away....

NOW STREAMING

LEGO STAR WARS REBUILD THE GALAXY

Starring Gaten Matarazzo, Tony Revolori, Bobby Moynihan, Marsai Martin, Michael Cusack, Ahmed Best, and Mark Hamill
Disney+

STAR WARS YOUNG JEDI ADVENTURES

Season Two
Starring JeCobi Swain, Juliet Donenfeld, Emma Berman,and Dee Bradley Baker
Disney+

COMING SOON

STAR WARS SKELETON CREW

Starring Jude Law, Ravi Cabot-Conyers, Ryan Kiera Armstrong, Kyriana Kratter, and Robert Timothy Smith
Disney+

IN DEVELOPMENT

STAR WARS AHSOKA

Season Two
Starring Rosario Dawson as Ahsoka Tano.
Disney+

STAR WARS THE MANDALORIAN

THE MANDALORIAN AND GROGU
Directed by Jon Favreau

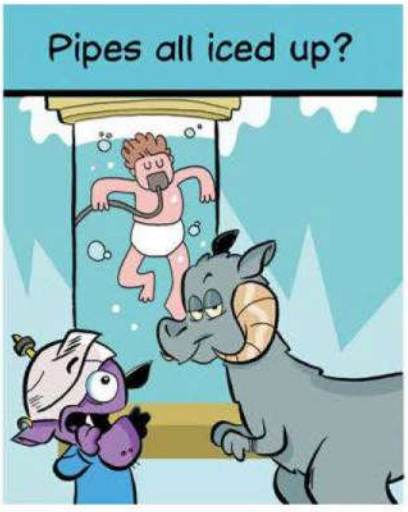
Anakin Reunites With Ahsoka

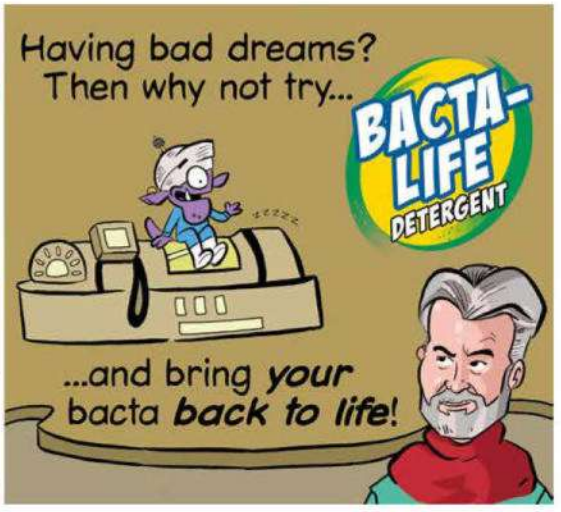
Take one final lesson with this essential Skyguy figure

Ahsoka Tano's near-death experience on Seatos presented her with the unexpected trial of facing her old master, Anakin Skywalker, once again in *Star Wars: Ahsoka*. The brand new Hot Toys Anakin Skywalker Sixth Scale Figure harnesses the chosen one's Clone Wars-era look from the episode "Part Five: Shadow Warrior," and boasts a groundbreaking head sculpt with an amazing likeness of the former Jedi general. Complete with a well-tailored Jedi ensemble, an LED light-up lightsaber, a host of accessories, and a sand-themed display base, Anakin appears ready to instruct his Padawan in one final lesson. The Anakin Skywalker (Clone Wars) Sixth Scale Figure can be acquired for $265 on **Sideshow.com**.

THE LIGHT SIDE

By Jamie Cosley





Running the Gauntlet

Communicating your *Star Wars* passion over the air

Keeping in touch with your allies during a battle is key, whether you're a Jedi Knight facing down a legion of battle droids or a rebel cell infiltrating an Imperial outpost. This set of *Star Wars* Gauntlet Communicators, available now at **DisneyStore.com**, make it possible for you and your friends to communicate over short distances while acting out events from the galaxy far, far away. Featuring two gauntlets with woven wristbands, each communicator operates on a 2.4ghz frequency, and features light and sound effects, including a projector that casts a hologram-like image of Luke Skywalker's faithful astromech R2-D2!

Senatorial Style

Fantastic formal galactic outfits

While Star Wars is well-known for its intriguing character designs and one-of-a-kind fashion choices, the dress worn by Leia Organa during her attempted escape from the *Tantive IV* was definitely one of the saga's most iconic looks. Disney Store's Princess Leia Dress gives you a chance to show off the same look, as it is furnished with an attached hood, elastic waist, lined skirt, and simulated metal belt with faux metallic detailing. Leia's mother also maintained an enviable wardrobe, and the Padmé Amidala Cloak embodies the flowing outfit she wore in *Star Wars: Attack of the Clones*. Made from velour fabric, the cloak is highlighted by an intricate burn out pattern and oversized pleated hood. If you're in need of everyday wear, the Formal Tunic combines premium cosplay with an elegantly tailored tunic that will make you feel right at home in the *Star Wars* galaxy.

Check out **DisneyStore.com**, where you can enhance your wardrobe with the Princess Leia Dress ($129.99), Padmé Amidala Cloak ($149.99), and *Star Wars* Formal Tunic ($69.99).

The *StarWars* DotColumn

Fascinating features and articles from the digital vaults of StarWars.com

Add StarWars.com/Insider to your browser bookmarks to enjoy *Insider*'s pick of the best of the official *Star Wars* website.

Phantom at 25: Ahmed Best
The actor, educator, and futurist looks back on his collaboration with George Lucas and Industrial Light & Magic.

Vernestra Rwoh
StarWars.com correspondent Kelly Knox profiles the High Republic Jedi Knight.

The First Celebration
StarWars.com looks back at the people who created and attended the very first *Star Wars* Celebration in 1999.

Beware of the Wampa

Ice cool prop replica bares its teeth

Luke Skywalker's run-in with a wampa in Hoth's hostile weather was an experience he'd surely rather forget, but the prop itself is well worth remembering. Regal Robot's Wampa Prop Replica is a static resin and mixed media bust which faithfully replicates the original puppet that was crafted to film the creature's initial close-ups. Developed with extensive hands-on examination of the original artifact, this Archive Collection replica is loaded with hand-finished details. Measuring nearly 20 inches wide, the limited signature edition includes a metal plaque hand-signed by legendary creature creator Phil Tippett. Pack up your tauntaun and venture over to **RegalRobot.com**, where you can pick up your own Phil Tippett Signature Edition Wampa Prop Replica for $2,499.

The Cantina is Open

A hive of fun and villainy from HasLab

When Luke Skywalker followed Obi-Wan Kenobi into the Mos Eisley Cantina, the wretched hive immersed fans in the out-of-this-world glory of the *Star Wars* galaxy. The latest crowdfunded HasLab product by Hasbro has harnessed that wondrous experience with The Vintage Collection Mos Eisley Cantina, a sprawling set measuring more than 32 inches long by over 19 inches wide, and is based on original blueprints and set drawings of the iconic setting from *Star Wars: A New Hope*.

The fully modular set consists of an external façade, the main archway and stairs leading to the large bar, three seating booths, and a variety of tables, chairs, and cup accessories. A deluxe option adds three more modular booth sections and even more accessories. The 3.75-inches scale recreation arrives with exclusive action figures of patrons Brea and Senni Tonnika, as well as the gruff bartender who won't serve droids, Wuher.

The campaign closed on July 8, having achieved more than 8000 backers. You can follow the product's progress at **HasbroPulse.com**.

GUNGAN GEAR

BOMBAD BEST BUYS FROM THE GALAXY FAR, FAR AWAY

BACKPACKING WITH BINKS

Jar Jar will be with you, always!

After leaving Gungan City, Jar Jar Binks embarked on a series of adventures that took him to Tatooine, Coruscant, and countless other worlds. Inspired by everyone's favorite Gungan, the Jar Jar Binks Convertible Mini Backpack boasts the character's signature features and is made with fuzzy faux sherpa detail, embroidery, and appliqué. A front zippered pocket, interior zippered pocket, and adjustable straps that detach to create a crossbody style promise to provide you with ample storage space and keep you comfortable on any exciting excursion. With its height and width measuring 8 inches by 11 inches, the Jar Jar Binks Convertible Mini Backpack is priced at $49.90 and can be found on **HerUniverse.com**.

WARRIOR'S WARDROBE

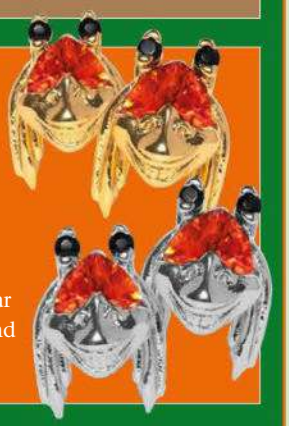
Gungan gear that takes you on a tour of Naboo's breathtaking flora

From the very moment Jar Jar Binks met Qui-Gon Jinn on Naboo, the Gungan demonstrated an incomparable inquisitive and gregarious nature which either endeared him to those around him or propelled him into unforgettable mishaps. The RSVLTS Gungan Style Crewneck Tee channels Jar Jar Binks' energetic persona and pairs his visage with vividly colorful flora on the shirt's front and back sides. The Gungan Style crewneck is made from the signature softness of RSVLTS' distinctive "World's Most Comfortable T-shirt," a blended material consisting of 50% polyester, 25% cotton, and 25% rayon. This spirited Gungan Style Crewneck Tee retails for $32 and is available on **RSVLTS.com**.

RESEMBLE THE GENERAL

Light up your earlobes like Otoh Gunga

From military general to planetary representative, Jar Jar Binks held many roles in his lifetime. Regardless of his rank or position, Jar Jar's boisterous personality always proved capable of lighting up the room. Girls Crew catches this brilliance in its new Jar Jar Binks Studs, a tribute to the Gungan that captures his image in a vibrant orange stone. Accentuated by intricate metal face details, the studs measure approximately 1 centimeter in length, utilize cubic zirconia stones, and feature sterling silver posts and butterfly backings. Obtain your own pair on **ShopGirlsCrew.com**, where these Jar Jar Binks Studs retail for $45 and can be found in gold, rose gold, and silver variants.



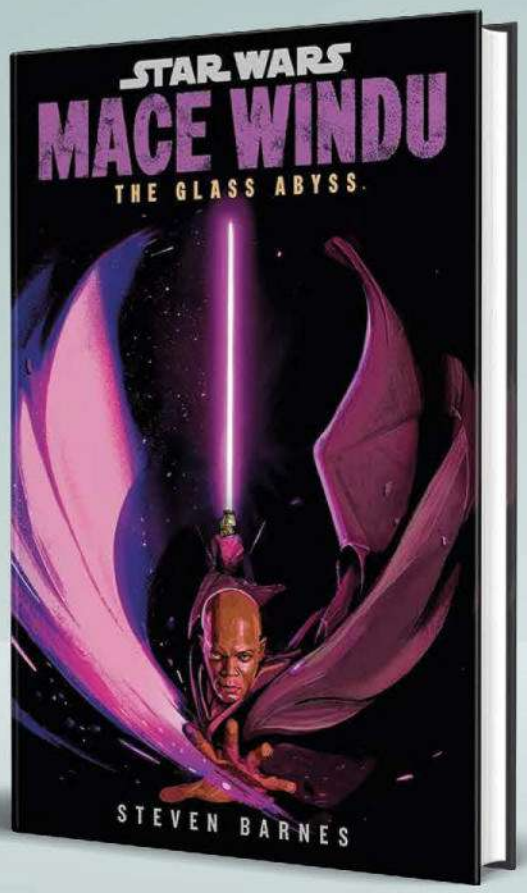
A BOMBAD BOOMA

Fight against the Trade Federation with this fantastic Funko Pop!

With a space battle raging in orbit and a covert team infiltrating the city of Theed, the Gungan Grand Army demonstrated its courage and tenacity by facing off against the Trade Federation's droid forces among Naboo's rolling hills. Jar Jar Binks played a pivotal role in the battle, becoming a general and deploying booma energy balls to defend his planet. To celebrate *Star Wars: The Phantom Menace*'s 25th anniversary, Funko is honoring Jar Jar Binks' heroics with the Pop! Jar Jar Binks with Booma Balls, a 4.45-inch tall vinyl bobblehead that captures his contributions to beating Viceroy Nute Gunray's troops. The Pop! Jar Jar Binks with Booma Balls can be purchased on **Funko.com**, where it can be added to your collection for $12.

Book Club

The latest *Star Wars* books uncover secrets from the Age of the Republic



Qui-Gon Jinn's Final Request

Mace Windu takes on a dangerous mission to honor his late friend

In this original *Star Wars* novel by author Steven Barnes, Jedi Master Mace Windu ventures to a devastated world to fulfill the last wishes of his friend and fellow Jedi, Qui-Gon Jinn.

Set in the aftermath of Qui-Gon Jinn's death at the hands of Darth Maul in *Star Wars: The Phantom Menace*, *Mace Windu: The Glass Abyss*, from Random House Worlds, sees the respected member of the Jedi Council embark on a perilous journey to an embattled world.

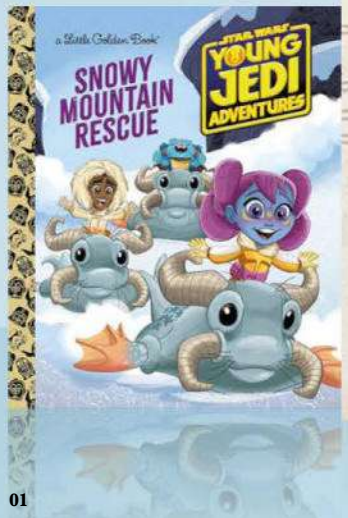
Windu always had complicated feelings about his late colleague, and frequently disagreed with Qui-Gon's freewheeling approach while still valuing his commitment to the living Force—not to mention his insights into other cultures. His friend's sudden absence has left Mace without a sounding board, setting him adrift and making him feel out of balance.

However, upon hearing Qui-Gon's last communication, labeled with instructions that it be delivered to Windu only in the event of Jinn's death, everything seems to be put into perspective. Qui-Gon begs Mace to intervene on the Outer Rim world of Metagos, still suffering after a violent solar flare many years before. With the planet's already-harsh desert now transformed into an irradiated wasteland, the survivors eke out a subterranean existence as rival clans fight to control the world's few remaining resources.

Qui-Gon Jinn once protected the Sa'ad farming clan from less scrupulous factions, valuing their art of "dream-weaving" to communicate with wild creatures. He swore to return to the planet if the Sa'ad required his aid, and now it falls to Mace to honor that vow.

As Windu investigates an intricate web of adversaries and allies, he finds himself pushed to the very limits of the Jedi Code and even his relationship to the Force itself! On sale October 15.

01



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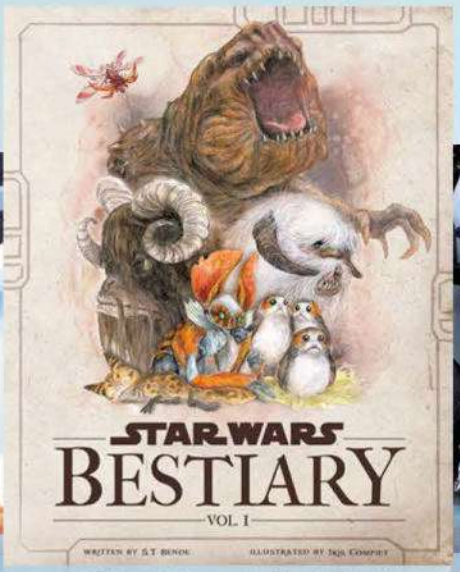
Star Wars: Young Jedi Adventures: Snowy Mountain Rescue

The Little Golden Books series of classic children's stores have been published for more than 80 years. This fall, *Star Wars: Young Jedi Adventures: Snowy Mountain Rescuewill join the iconic lineup.* Based on the animated series airing on Disney Jr. and Disney+, this story follows Jedi-in-training Kai Brightstar and his friends Nubs and Lys Solay as they struggle to help ranchers move a herd of wellagrins through a snowy mountain passage that has been rocked by frequent avalanches. Does Lys have the confidence and the skills to corral the frightened creatures so they can be led to safety? Find out when the book goes on sale September 3!

02



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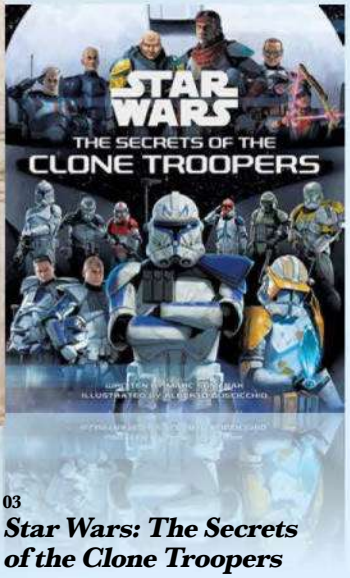
Star Wars Bestiary Volume 1

This hardcover compendium, the first in a two-book series, offers *Star Wars* fans an unprecedented look into the habitats, behaviors, and lifecycles of the galaxy's most intriguing creatures. From the friendly to the fierce, each creature is brought to life through original artwork by illustrator Iris Compiet (*The Dark Crystal Bestiary: The Definitive Guide to the Creatures of Thra*), accompanied by explanatory text courtesy of writer S.T. Bende. *Star Wars Bestiary Vol. 1*, on sale November 5 from Insight Editions, covers the gamut from bantha pack beasts and harmless porgs, to ravenous wampas and even the legendary Mythosaur of Mandalorian folklore!

03



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Star Wars: The Secrets of the Clone Troopers

The inner workings of the Grand Army of the Republic are laid bare on October 8 with Insight Editions' *Star Wars: The Secrets of the Clone Troopers*. In this guidebook for readers of all ages, the lives of individual clone soldiers are detailed from their births on Kamino to the battlefields of the Clone Wars, including the horrors of Order 66!

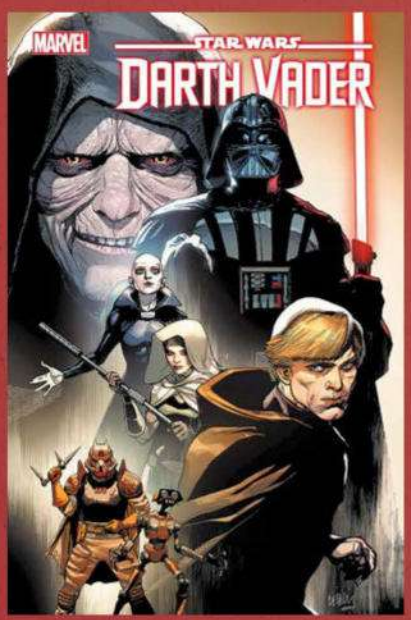
Writer Marc Sumerak lays down the lore behind Captain Rex, Commander Cody, the Bad Batch, and more, while interactive features (including pop-ups, booklets, and lift-the-flap inserts) encourage deeper reader engagement. Featuring original illustrations and a frameable 11x17-inch poster of the book's cover art by Alberto Buscicchio, *The Secrets of the Clone Troopers* is a must-have for fans of the galaxy's stoic warriors.

Comics Roundup

Conclusions and new beginnings are on their way in the latest *Star Wars* comics

A Dual Grand Finale

Two comic-book sagas reach their climax in *Star Wars* #50 and *Darth Vader* #50



For nearly five years, Marvel Comics has published the flagship series *Star Wars* alongside its dark-side equivalent *Darth Vader*, with both serials set in the tumultuous period between the events of *Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back* and *Return of the Jedi*. Starring iconic heroes from the original trilogy including Luke Skywalker, Leia Organa, and Lord Vader himself, both comics have shed light on a grim time for the Rebellion while exploring Vader's trials as an agent of evil.

In September, this epoch in the *Star Wars* comics saga comes to an end when both titles celebrate their 50th issue milestones. Each finale will appear as oversized, fifty-page epics, clearing the way for a series of all-new *Star Wars* comics that will follow in their wake. Marvel is still keeping a lid on the details, but fans can look forward to a new era of adventures set in a different timeframe of galactic history.

In the plus-sized *Star Wars* #50, Jedi Master Luke Skywalker struggles to teach his student Ben Solo a vital lesson about the true balance between the light side and the dark side of the Force. To illustrate his point, he relates a tale from the former days of the Rebel Alliance, an exercise that touches on many eras of the *Star Wars* saga at once and brings this mammoth run to a rewarding conclusion.

Star Wars #50 is written by Charles Soule, with art by Madibek Musabekov and a cover by Leinil Francis Yu. Variant covers include Chris Sprouse's *Star Wars: The Phantom Menace* 25th anniversary art, John Tyler Christopher's action figure variant, and others by Yu, Stephen Segovia, David Lopez, and Giuseppe Camuncoli. *Star Wars* #50 is on sale September 11.

Darth Vader also receives a giant-sized sendoff as writer Greg Pak teams up with Raffaele Ienco and other artists on *Darth Vader* #50. As the long-running series reaches its endgame, the Dark Lord chooses to finally unleash the power he has accumulated via the breakaway faction known as the "Schism Imperial." And the Sith Lord directs it at the only person he hates more than himself: his master, Emperor Palpatine!

Featuring final twists for key characters including Sabé, Ochi, Sly Moore, and ZED-6-7, *Darth Vader* #50 is on sale September 18. With a newsstand cover by Leinil Francis Yu, you'll also find variant covers from artists including Chris Sprouse, John Giang, Rod Reis, Giuseppe Camuncoli, and Rafael Albuquerque.

Star Wars #50
Chris Sprouse Variant

Star Wars #50 John Tyler
Christopher Variant

Star Wars #50
David López Variant

Star Wars #50 Stephen
Segovia Variant

Ahsoka #3 (of 8)

Marvel's miniseries translating the Disney+ show *Star Wars: Ahsoka* into the comic book medium continues this fall with issue #3 of the 8-issue limited series. In this adaptation by writer Rodney Barnes and artist Steven Cummings, *Star Wars Rebels* heroes Ahsoka Tano and Sabine Wren venture to the planet Seatos in their search for Imperial mastermind Grand Admiral Thrawn and their missing friend Ezra Bridger, only to be opposed by the mysterious Force-users Baylan Skoll and Shin Hati. Meanwhile, Hera Syndulla tangles with the surprising perils of New Republic politics! Featuring cover art by Phil Noto, *Ahsoka* #3 is on sale September 25.

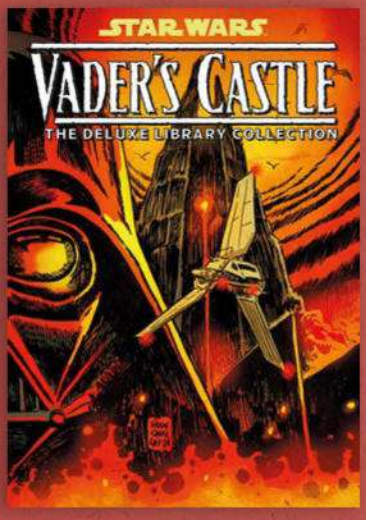
Inquisitors #3 (of 4)

Issue #3 of this four-issue Marvel Comics series dives even deeper into the Inquisitors—the Jedi-hunting dark siders who act as living weapons in the service of the Emperor. Their goal is to exterminate all survivors of the Jedi Order, and in *Inquisitors* #3, courtesy of writer Rodney Barnes and artist Ramon Rosanas, the fugitive Jedi Tensu Run is a wanted man. When Darth Vader tasks the Seventh and Ninth Sisters with drawing Tensu Run out of hiding, it sets the stage for one of the strangest battles ever seen! With a cover by Nick Bradshaw and variant covers from Carlo Pagulayan and Chris Sprouse, *Inquisitors* #3 is on sale September 11.

Star Wars: Vader's Castle Deluxe Library Collection

Horror comes to a galaxy far, far away in this compendium of terrifying tales by writer Cavan Scott, as told in the dank and mysterious corridors of the Dark Lord of the Sith's castle on Mustafar. Quake with fear as heroes and villains from Obi-Wan Kenobi to Jabba the Hutt (and even Ewoks) face untold scares.

Collecting spooky tales from three *Vader's Castle* mini-series released in 2018, 2019, and 2021, and the only ever reprint of *Shadow of Vader's Castle*, this 424-page hardcover book from Dark Horse Comics is on sale October 8.



Incoming

Don't Miss These Upcoming Releases

AUGUST

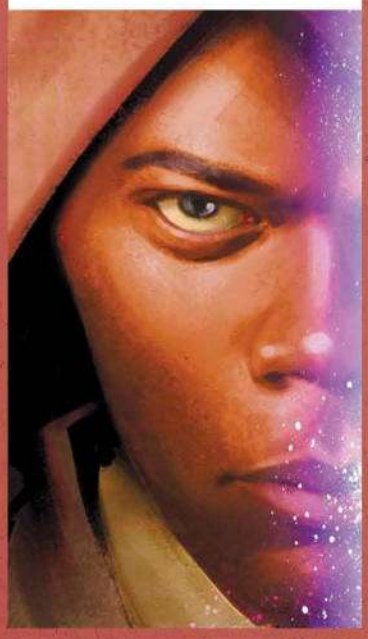
***Mace Windu: The Twilight Run* Trade paperback**
Marvel Comics
Writer: Marc Bernadin
Artist: Georges Jeanty
Cover Artist: Mateus Manhanini

SEPTEMBER

***Star Wars Legends Epic Collection: The Rebellion* Vol. 6 Trade paperback**
Marvel Comics
Writers: Various
Artists: Various
Cover Artist: Hugh Fleming

***Star Wars* Vol. 8: *The Sith and the Skywalker* Trade paperback**
Marvel Comics
Writer: Charles Soule
Artists: Various
Cover Artist: Stephen Segovia

***Star Wars Darth Vader* Vol. 9: *Rise of the Schism Imperial* Trade paperback**
Marvel Comics
Writer: Greg Pak
Artists: Various
Cover Artist: Leinil Francis Yu



STAR WARS THE HIGH REPUBLIC

Luminous Lore

Shining a light on *Star Wars: The High Republic*

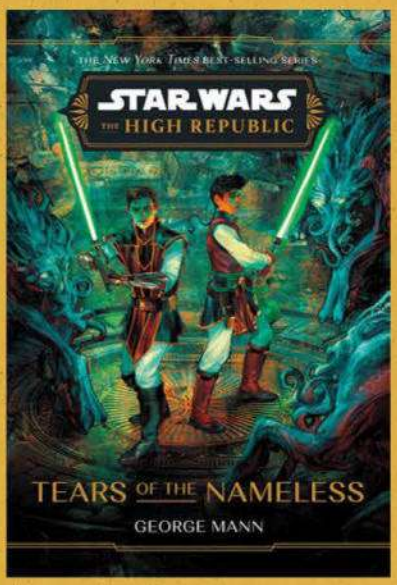
Here Come the Tears!

Heartbreak for the Jedi Knights as they face their Nameless fears

Author George Mann returns to the High Republic era with *Tears of the Nameless*, a rollercoaster of a novel that follows on from the events of Tessa Gratton and Justina Ireland's *Defy the Storm*.

Jedi Knight Reath Silas takes center stage alongside Padawan Amadeo Azzazzo as the duo undertake a mission to put theories about the Nameless to the test. But to stand any chance of defeating the terrifying creatures, they must not only confront the monsters but also their deepest fears. "The stakes couldn't be higher, and we're going to see poor Reath pushed to the limit," Mann told *Insider*. "He's trying his best, bearing the expectations of the entire Jedi order on his shoulders, but he's not sure which way to turn for guidance and advice. And then there's Amadeo, a bright young Padawan who's seen the horror of the blight firsthand and just wants to help save everyone, but finds himself thrown into more peril than he could have possibly imagined. Meanwhile, Vernestra Roh has returned to Coruscant following the events of *Temptation of the Force*, only to discover that nothing there is quite as safe as she'd thought. It's a book that puts our young heroes through the wringer, and I hope people are going to enjoy the ride!"

Known for his love of monsters, mythology, and horror, this latest *Star Wars* tale from Mann digs deep into the genres that inspire him. "Exploring the nature of fear and how it relates to the Jedi is one of the most interesting things about writing *The High Republic*, and this book in particular," he explains. "While the Nameless serve as a very clear physical manifestation of that, there's also the more existential threat they pose—the fact they represent loss of control, the undoing of a Jedi's conscious mind. But there are other types of fear, too, and we see that through the



character of Azlin, and the journeys that both Reath And Cohmac go through in the book. Any more would be to give away too much, but it's been a fascinating theme to write about." On sale September 24 from Disney Lucasfilm Press.

High Stakes Odyssey

The Search for Starlight Survivors!

Collecting the first five issues of Dark Horse Comics' *Star Wars: The High Republic Adventures*, Daniel José Older's comic-book series picks up a year after the fall of Starlight Beacon.

With the forces of the Republic in disarray, the Nihil continue their advance, creating carnage across every system they sweep through. Jedi Knight Qort and others search for missing allies that were caught up in the disaster. But how many escaped the fall of Starlight Beacon alive, and where have they been hidden for all these months? Zeen Mrala uncovers evidence of survivors scattered across the galaxy, and begins her quest to reunite them, rebuild her team, and head into battle for light and life!

With art by Harvey Tolibao, Elisa Romboli, Nick Brokenshire, and colorist Michael Atiyeh, the collection is on sale August 27.

INCOMING COMICS

The High Republic comic-book releases arriving this August and September!

The High Republic Adventures: Echoes of Fear #1
Dark Horse Comics
Writer: George Mann
Artists: Vincenzo Federici & Vincenzo Riccardi
Cover Artist: Eduardo Mello
On sale: September 4

The High Republic Adventures: Crash and Burn
Dark Horse Comics
Writer: Daniel José Older
Artists: Nick Brokenshire & Michael Atiyeh
Cover Artist: Rachele Aragno
On sale: August 28

Star Wars: The Acolyte Kelnacca #1
Marvel Comics
Writer: Cavan Scott
Artist: Marika Cresta
Cover Artist: Phil Noto
On sale: September 4

The High Republic Adventures #10
Dark Horse Comics
Writer: Daniel José Older
Artists: Toni Bruno, Michael Atiyeh
Cover Artist: Harvey Tolibao
On sale: September 11

Republic Roundup

(Excluding Comics & Manga)

PHASE I

Light of the Jedi
Writer: Charles Soule
Random House Worlds, Adult novel

A Test of Courage
Writer: Justina Ireland
Disney Lucasfilm Press, Middle Grade novel

The Great Jedi Rescue
Writer: Cavan Scott
Artist: Petur Antonsson
Disney Lucasfilm Press, 8x8 storybook

Into the Dark
Writer: Claudia Gray
Disney Lucasfilm Press, Young Adult novel

The Rising Storm
Writer: Cavan Scott
Random House Worlds, Adult novel

Race to Crashpoint Tower
Writer: Daniel José Older
Disney Lucasfilm Press, Middle Grade novel

Out of the Shadows
Writer: Justina Ireland
Disney Lucasfilm Press, Young Adult novel

Tempest Runner
Writer: Cavan Scott
Random House Worlds, Audio original novel

Showdown at the Fair
Writer: George Mann
Artist: Petur Antonsson
Disney Lucasfilm Press, 8x8 storybook

Mission to Disaster
Writer: Justina Ireland
Disney Lucasfilm Press, Middle Grade novel

The Fallen Star
Writer: Claudia Gray
Random House Worlds, Adult novel

The Battle for Starlight
Writer: George Mann
Artist: Petur Antonsson
Disney Lucasfilm Press, 8x8 storybook

Midnight Horizon
Writer: Daniel José Older
Disney Lucasfilm Press, Young Adult novel

PHASE II

Path of Deceit
Writers: Justina Ireland and Tessa Gratton
Disney Lucasfilm Press, Young Adult novel

Quest for the Hidden City
Writer: George Mann
Disney Lucasfilm Press, Middle Grade novel

Convergence
Writer: Zoraida Córdova
Random House Worlds, Adult novel

The Battle of Jedha
Writer: George Mann
Random House Worlds, Audio original novel

Cataclysm
Writer: Lydia Kang
Random House Worlds, Adult novel

Quest for Planet X
Writer: Tessa Gratton
Disney Lucasfilm Press, Young Adult novel

PHASE III

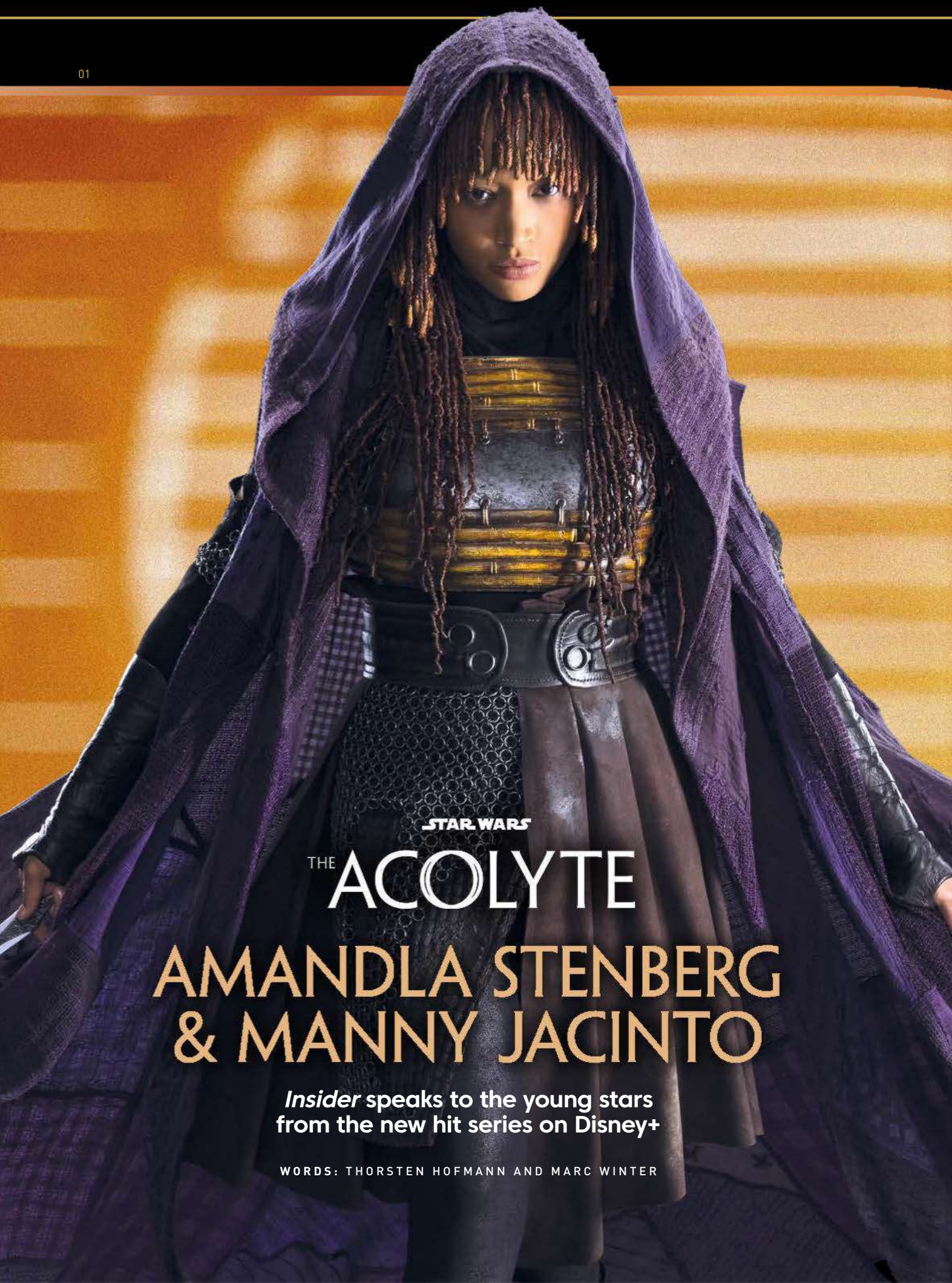
The Eye of Darkness
Writer: George Mann
Random House Worlds, Adult novel

Escape from Valo
Writer: Daniel José Older and Alyssa Wong
Disney Lucasfilm Press, Young Adult novel

Defy the Storm
Writer: Tessa Gratton and Justina Ireland
Disney Lucasfilm Press, Young Adult novel

Temptation of the Force
Writer: Tessa Gratton
Random House Worlds, Adult novel

Beware the Nameless
Writer: Zoraida Córdova
Disney Lucasfilm Press, Young Adult novel



STAR WARS

THE ACOLYTE

AMANDLA STENBERG & MANNY JACINTO

Insider speaks to the young stars from the new hit series on Disney+

WORDS: THORSTEN HOFMANN AND MARC WINTER

01 Amandla Stenberg as Mae.

02 Manny Jacinto as Qimir.

The arrival of *Star Wars: The Acolyte* on Disney+ on June 4, 2024, took us on a journey into the High Republic era, with a story centered around a tragic event that sent twin sisters on very different paths. Actors Amandla Stenberg and Manny Jacinto look back on their experiences making the series.

***Star Wars Insider*: What can you tell us about the characters you play in *Star Wars: The Acolyte*?**

Amandla Stenberg: I play Mae and her sister Osha Aniseya. Mae has a complicated relationship with the Force. She's on a quest to atone for some past events but is challenged by what she experiences in the galaxy along the way.

Manny Jacinto: I play Qimir, who is a tradesmen and a former smuggler; basically just a guy minding his own business. But eventually the audience, and characters, learn that Qimir is an alias for the Stranger, Mae's mysterious master who's been hiding in plain sight.

Having to keep track of both character's motivations was a fun thing to explore. Qimir wants Mae to accomplish the goal of becoming an Acolyte—encouraging her to fulfill this promise that she made to the master, reminding her of what her task actually is as opposed to just fulfilling her own agenda of revenge. The Stranger wants her to defeat a Jedi without a weapon to fulfill the prophecy of becoming the Acolyte.

Amandla, you were a big fan of *Star Wars* before you were cast in *The Acolyte*, and you've even cosplayed as *Star Wars* characters in the past. How was it to now become a part of this galaxy?

AS: Oh, my goodness! I think [my fandom] factored into so many ▶

"FANS ARE REALLY EXCITED ABOUT THE HIGH REPUBLIC ERA."
AMANDLA STENBERG

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different elements of working on the show. I've always been such a huge fan of sci-fi and fantasy. I've always loved conventions. So, of course, when it came to the character design, I was thinking, what would be fun to cosplay, and particularly what would be fun for black girls to cosplay? That contributed to our wig design and so many other character elements, and not just physically but also emotionally, in how I approached playing Mae and Osha, and how I wanted the characters to feel different than you might traditionally find in this world.

It was very surreal. Every time that I walked onto a set I was in awe. When you're working on *Star Wars*, you're astounded by the sheer amount of technical ability and skill and artisanship that goes into making something like this, whether it's animatronics and puppeteers, or a set or a costume design, and the maintenance of all those elements, like CG, cinematographers, and lighting. So many of the craftspeople involved were huge *Star Wars* fans, so that energy permeated throughout the whole set.

"STAR WARS IS VERY MUCH A UNIVERSAL STORY THAT EVERYONE CAN RELATE TO."
MANNY JACINTO

How was it for you, Manny?

MJ: I was intimidated coming onto this project, because I knew Leslye Headland (the creator of the series) was such a die-hard fan. Also, learning from Amandla and from the project designers, it gave me a far bigger appreciation for the world

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03 Qimir (Jacinto) provides Mae (Stenberg) with a vial of poison.

04 Leslye Headland (right) directs Amandla Stenberg as Mae on the set of *Star Wars: The Acolyte*.

05 Amandla Stenberg as Osha.

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06 Qimir (Manny Jacinto) was revealed to be a secret sith, the Stranger.

> "*THE ACOLYTE* HAS A DIFFERENTIATION IN TONE BECAUSE IT HAS AN ASSASSIN ARCHETYPE NARRATIVE."
> AMANDLA STENBERG

building and the galaxy. I loved *Star Wars* as a kid, I love it even more now. To be able to bring a new character into this world was a dream come true.

What is about *Star Wars* that brings you the most joy?

AS: I love any exploration into Force theory: conversations about the light and the dark side, whether or not balance maintains throughout the galaxy, how the Force originated. I love the lore about the Father, the Son, and the Daughter from *Star Wars: The Clone Wars*. I love this idea that no matter what happens, the Force always returns to some state of homeostasis.

MJ: I think I should probably start answering these questions first, because my answers aren't as smart as Amandla's (*Amandla giggles*). But basically, I just love how *Star Wars* brings together people of different cultures and countries, how it resonates and affects others.... It's cool to be able to be a part of the galaxy that can do that. *Star Wars* is very much a universal story that everyone can relate to.

How does *The Acolyte* differ from the live-action *Star Wars* series we've seen so far?

MJ: For me, I love the physicality that we were able to bring to this show. I think it's something we may have taken a risk with, but that risk really paid off.

AS: *The Acolyte* has a differentiation in tone because it has an assassin archetype narrative and those choreographed fight sequences. Like Manny said, there is a physicality in the show that is different from past *Star Wars*. We still had the classic elements of the hero's journey, adventure, action, and humor, but we also had references to martial arts films like *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000) and *Kill Bill* (2003).

How did you prepare physically and psychologically for your roles?

MJ: They brought me in early. I don't know why, because it was mainly Amandla doing the physical stuff. Maybe they just didn't want me to feel left out. But I think there was also the mental aspect of preparing ourselves. Leslye was kind enough to give us that lead time, to be prepared physically and mentally, because it was such a huge project to take on. We spent eight months in the U.K., away from home over the winter, so ▶

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it took a lot. I would say of all the projects I've worked on so far, this was probably the one that really tested my physical and mental capacity, but it was also incredibly creatively fulfilling.

AS: I spent seven weeks in the gym. I started by learning some kung fu and boxing foundations, and then getting into my stunt choreography and fight sequences. By the end of the shoot I could pick up fight sequences so much more quickly, and on the fly if I needed to. It was such a rewarding, amazing experience to learn about myself in that way. I really feel like I grew as a performer. I learned a lot about myself spiritually and psychologically, and what I believed I was capable of and able to achieve in a high-pressure environment. There were definitely some parallels between Mae and what I experienced.

07 Amandla Stenberg (left) rehearsing a fight scene.

08

08 Qimir (Jacinto) under Jedi interogation.

This is the first *Star Wars* series that concentrates on the world of the Sith. How did you like exploring a world that has been shrouded in so much mystery?

MJ: It's something a lot of the fans were craving for, an exploration of the dark side, and how it started to manifest during a time that was the golden age of the Jedi. What enabled a dark force to come through? To be able to do this with Amandla and Leslye and our whole team, and to express the story well through plot but also through physicality, was fascinating for me.

AS: I really love how rich that point in the timeline is, but at the same time there's not a lot of onscreen lore around it, so we had a lot of creative freedom in many ways. Fans are really excited about the High Republic era. It's such a foundational part of what is to come, with such a different array of Force users across the galaxy, and that really opened things up narratively

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for us. So, there was pressure, but it was also so exciting.

Leslye Headland has described the show as "*Frozen* meets *Kill Bill*." Do you agree with her and, if so, why?

AS: I totally agree. *Frozen* (2013) because good stories in general don't have stereotypes. They're not rigid in their stereotypes but rather complex when it comes to whether characters are good or bad, where their intentions come from, and the events of their life that might have shaped who they are. Those are important to look at whenever we look at corruption or whenever we look at power. In that way, *The Acolyte* is very similar to *Frozen*. And then *Kill Bill* (2003) is just a sick assassin narrative, and it's one of my and Leslye's favorite movies.

I adore Leslye. She feels like my platonic work wife, and we are married forever now. She's one of my favorite people in the world, and I'm so, so grateful that she entrusted me with this role. She's a delightful, hilarious, intelligent, hyper-creative, crazy person. And that is my favorite kind of person (*laughs*).

MJ: Working with Leslye was a whirlwind, because she was just so passionate about this story. But she also comes from a theater background, so she was so open to collaboration. It was so refreshing to be able to work with a showrunner who really took in your ideas and actually implemented them. We had that seven weeks to really prepare before we started filming, so we were able to contribute creatively to the project.

"WORKING WITH LESLYE [HEADLAND] WAS A WHIRLWIND, BECAUSE SHE WAS JUST SO PATIONATE ABOUT THIS STORY."
MANNY JACINTO

09 Amandla Stenberg posing with lightsabers from *The Acolyte*.

10 Assassin Mae Aniseya (Amandla Stenberg).

got blue milk?

***Insider* talks to a food scientist to discover why the blue-colored dishes that are commonplace in *Star Wars* are relatively rare here on Earth; and learns how you can lend any menu a galactic theme by adding just one simple ingredient.**

WORDS: MELISSA T. MILLER

Blue milk and similarly hued foods are something of a recurring theme in *Star Wars* cuisine, but here on Earth—not so much! Sure, a trip to the store can yield endless candies, sports drinks, and cereals with artificial additives lending them vibrant sapphire shades, but why is it that there are so few naturally occurring blue foods in the real world? The fact that blue milk, noodles, and spotchka work perfectly in the galaxy far, far away—and seem so strange to us—comes down to a few factors, including rarity and how our brains process color.

Why Is Blue Food Rare?

The natural color of plants and animals comes from either their structure or chemical composition. Structural color includes feathers and scales, which scatter light of certain wavelengths that therefore affect the colors that reach our eyes. This type of blue coloration is common—there are plenty of blue fish, birds, and butterflies.

"Most colors in food are chemical colors because structural colors are usually destroyed during food processing," says Changqi Liu, a professor at San Diego State University who studies the science of food and nutrition. But being chemically blue is rare. Edible things we think of as blue, like blueberries, are actually closer to purple once crushed. Blue cheese gets its color from mold added during the cheese-making process, something you wouldn't want in many other food products.

It's even rarer for the color to stay blue when food is heated, or acidic ingredients like citrus are added (which changes the balance

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of acidity, measured in pH). Anthocyanin, an antioxidant, is responsible for the blue, purple, and red coloration in many foods, but it only stays blue in certain conditions. Blue corn is one of the few examples of foods turning bluer when cooked. On the cob, it's closer to a purple color but when baked into tortilla chips, it's blue. "That is because you steep the kernels in limewater, which is a very alkaline condition that raises the pH, and that will change the color of the pigment to blue," says Liu.

Interestingly, a purple flower called the butterfly pea flower makes a blue concoction when brewed like a tea or ground into powder. If you're looking for a natural food dye, this is the perfect additive to create your own blue *Star Wars* dishes and drinks—perhaps using the recipes you'll find later in this feature!

01 Blue milk was a common beverage in Luke Skywalker's home in *Star Wars: A New Hope.*

02 Earthlings could enjoy Trumoo's *Star Wars* Blue Milk for a limited time in the U.S.

03 The galaxy had female bantha's to thank for their tasty blue milk.

Why Study Blue Dyes?

Since we've never seen a cooking holovid in *Star Wars*, we don't know whether special ingredients are added into blue noodles or cookies to give them their bright color. Spotchka is blue because that's the color of the krill its brewed with. And we know that bantha milk is naturally blue.

The *Star Wars* blue milk you could buy at stores, however, used Blue Dye #1 to get its deliciously galactic tint. Blue Dye #2 is another product used on Earth to color food products. Both are synthetic and made in labs, but #2 used to be made from indigo plants. Synthetic indigo is also used to dye blue jeans and other textiles.

Over the years, certain states and countries have banned some food dyes due to health concerns. In fact, ▶

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"A bantha's diet could have been responsible for the blue milk that females produced."

04

"Many animals accumulate pigments from their diet, leading to distinctive coloring."

A Blue Diet

Did you know that flamingos get their bright pink coloration from their diet? Carotenoids, another antioxidant that gives plants their pigments, builds up in shrimp through their own food source. When flamingos eat the shrimp, the pink or orange hues transfer into their new feathers. A similar process also turns shrimp the same

blue-raspberry flavor came about because a ban on Red Dye #2 happened just as Blue Dye #1 was approved. Plus, the red-colored flavor market was already crowded, and an artificial raspberry flavor had recently been concocted. "The current trend is towards substituting those synthetic dyes with natural pigments," says Liu. "However, many natural blue pigments lack stability." So, the hunt is on for a natural blue food dye that can be heated or mixed with acidic ingredients and retain its color.

04 Cyril Karn added blue milk to his breakfast cereal.

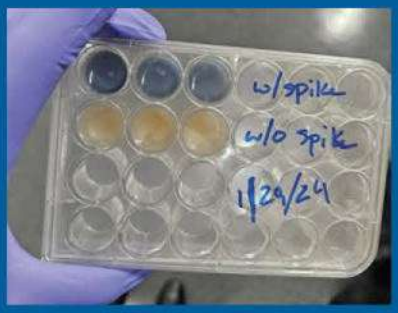
05 Beru Lars pouring a refreshing beaker of blue milk for husband Owen.

05

#BLUESOUP

In February 2023, Elinne Becket found some long-forgotten leftovers in her fridge. What had once been her mother's delicious beef soup had turned a bright and off-putting shade of blue. Becket threw the spoiled food away and shared her shock with the hashtag #BlueSoup.

Even as a microbiology professor at California State University, San Marcos, she had no idea what had turned her leftovers such a brilliant shade. Becket's followers wanted pictures of her blue soup, which she reluctantly fished out of the trash. "I posted the photo with a sensitive content tag, because nobody wants to see this without opting in," she says. But the microbiology community wanted more! One follower, Sebastian Cocioba, eventually convinced Becket to go back to the trash, take samples, and send them



to him for analysis. "I grabbed a Q-tip and dunked it in," the scientist remembers.

The #BlueSoup analysis came back with interesting results. Sequencing its genome revealed a bacteria called *Pseudomonas carnis*, known to cause blue discoloration in soy products. But Becket's swabs were a new strain, which she is naming *astazura*, a combination of her mom's name and azure (a sky blue shade). Meanwhile, her mom offered to make her more soup but planned to mix up the ingredients. "I told mom, 'This is science, we need replicates!' And she said, 'Fine, I'll make exactly the same thing.'" Becket added the strain of bacteria isolated in the lab to a small portion of the fresh broth. When the blue color came back, she had her proof.

While most people would have tossed the spoiled leftovers and moved on, Becket's ongoing thread of scientific experimentation went viral. "It's a commentary on the joy and beauty of science, and also the community—how science is done by groups of people and not by individuals," she says.

orange-pink color when cooked. Perhaps Sorgan was home to blue flamingos that ate the blue krill harvested by the planet's people?

"Many animals accumulate pigments from their diet, leading to distinctive coloring," says Liu. "A human example is when excessive consumption of carrots can turn the skin orange." So, could Max Rebo have been blue because of his diet? "It is possible," says our expert. "But it could also be a structural color like many blue animals on Earth have."

Likewise, a bantha's diet could have been responsible for the blue milk that females produced. The diet of cows can affect the color of their milk. Even human breast milk can change color if a person eats beets or other strongly tinted foods. Maybe banthas grazed on fields of blue wildflowers in the deserts of Tatooine, or there could be something in the processing of bantha milk after harvesting that turned it blue.

(Jedi) Mind Tricks

"The color of food can greatly influence our perception of flavor," says Liu. "Our brain uses visual cues to predict the flavor of food before we even take a bite. For example, when we see a green banana, our brain will tell us that it is unripe and may taste astringent, not sweet. When we see a yellow banana, we associate the color with sweet taste and ripe banana flavor."

Even professionals can be fooled. In one study, researchers added red coloring to white wine and offered it side by side with the regular white wine. "When professional wine tasters tasted the fake red wine, they sensed additional flavors such as chicory and chocolate that are typically associated with red wine," says Liu. "It's not because they were lying, but their brains were tricked by the color. If you add blue food coloring to your dairy or plant-based milk, it could very well taste different simply because your brain doesn't know what to expect."

The *Insider* Recipe Book

Enjoy our simple recipes for blue foods and drinks or turn your favorites blue!

Blue Basics

Now that we know the science behind the color of food, we can mess with nature and start creating some true-blue *Star Wars*-style dishes that wouldn't be out of place in the galaxy far, far away.

First you need to mix up the natural additive that can turn any food into a meal fit for a *Star Wars* cantina. You can buy butterfly pea flowers online, either as dried flowers or a flour-like powder. Fill a tea infuser with the dried flowers and place it in near-boiling water until it turns a lovely shade of blue. For a more intense blue color, try the powder. Stir the blue water into warm water or milk—2 teaspoons of powder per cup of water is plenty.

RECIPE 1 / LIGHTSABER SPOTCHKA

METHOD:

Enjoy your cocktail of choice with a base of butterfly pea flower tea that has had time to cool. Add any spirit and simple syrup to taste. Shake with ice in a cocktail shaker. Once you add acidic ingredients, including lemon juice, seltzer water, or anything carbonated, the color will change from blue to purple to pink. Add the acidic addition and watch it sink, changing the hue as it drops. Choose your perfect shade, just like you would a lightsaber. To add another dash of *Star Wars* flavor, add a rim of salt, either white or red like the salt flats of Crait.

Cheers! Or as the Chandrilans say, "Sagrona!"

RECIPE 2 / PURRGIL PRETZELS

INGREDIENTS:

Dough:

- 1 cup + 2 tablespoons of water (either blue tea or water pre-mixed with powder)
- 1 tablespoon vegetable oil
- 3 cups bread flour
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 tablespoon sugar
- 2 ½ teaspoons yeast

Topping:

- 1 egg white
- 1 tablespoon water
- Coarse salt

METHOD:

▷ Mix ingredients all together. We made our dough in a bread machine, but this can also be done in a large mixer, followed by kneading the dough. Let the dough rise for 60 minutes until it doubles in size. Sprinkle flour on your surface, knife, and hands, then cut the dough into 12 pieces.

▷ Roll each piece into a long, thin rope. Twist them into a pretzel shape or anything else you can think of. Place the pretzels onto a greased baking sheet, cover with a clean towel, and let rise for 25 minutes.

▷ Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Bring 2 quarts of water to boil in a large pot, then dissolve 3 tablespoons of salt into the water. Place 2-3 pretzels at a time into the boiling water. After 1 minute, flip them over and boil them for another minute. Put them back on the cookie sheet.

▷ Mix 1 tablespoon water and 1 egg white together and brush the top of the pretzels. Sprinkle with coarse salt and bake 20-25 minutes or until the outside is firm.

If you make *Star Wars* shapes like droids, TIE fighters, and insignias, your results may vary (as ours did). Whimsical fans will get the idea while chewing on these treats as twisty as Poe Dameron's X-wing maneuvers.

RECIPE 3 / DIANOGA DUMPLING SOUP

INGREDIENTS:

Dry Ingredients:

- 1 cup cake flour
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- ½ teaspoon salt

Wet Ingredients:

- 1 egg
- ¼ cup milk

Other:

- 5 cups broth (chicken, beef, or vegetable)

METHOD:

▷ Mix the dry ingredients together. Separately, mix the wet ingredients together and then slowly add them to the dry ingredients. The batter should be stiff and sticky. You can also add parsley, minced garlic, or other seasonings to taste.

▷ Bring 3 cups of stock to a boil in a large saucepan so it's only 1-2 inches deep. Dip a spoon into the stock, then scoop a spoonful of batter and drop it into the pan, making sure it doesn't stick to the bottom. Repeat until the pan is full or the batter is gone. Put a lid on the saucepan and simmer the dumplings for 10 minutes.

▷ Add 2 cups of blue tea or water pre-mixed with powder to 2 cups of stock and heat thoroughly. Add the dumplings and whatever else you want (onions, herbs, etc) into the soup. Add a squeeze of lime if you want to enjoy the color-changing effects. Best enjoyed on a Hoth-like cold day.

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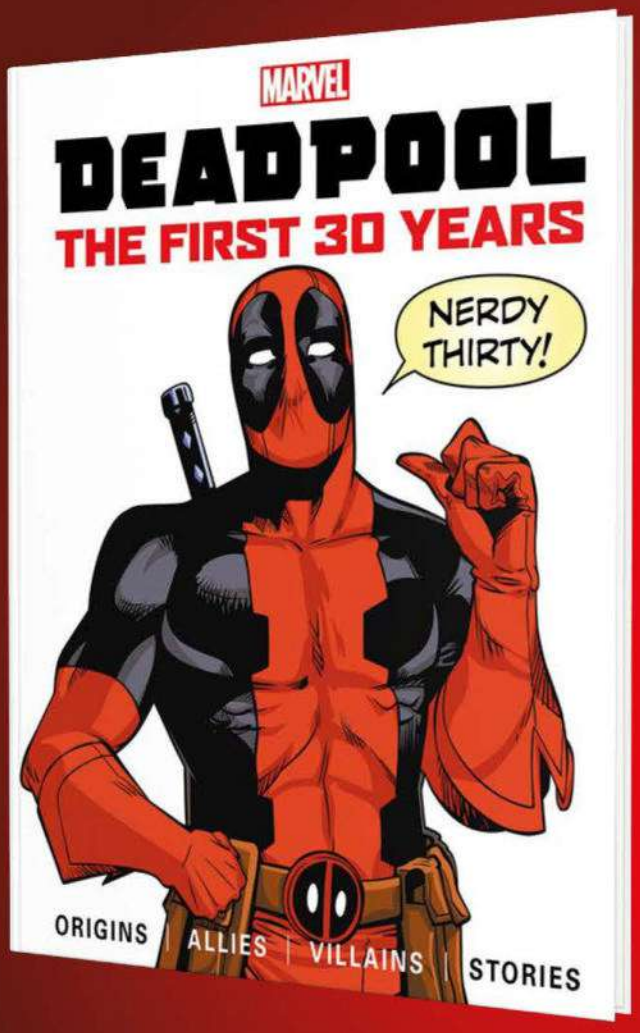

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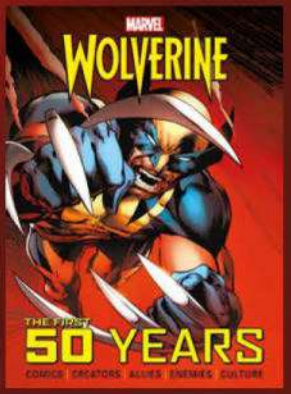

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01 Neal Scanlan (left) on location for *Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker* with Joonas Suotamo (right).

CREATURE

NEAL SCANLAN GIVES *INSIDER* A TOUR OF THE LUCASFILM CREATURE SHOP.

COMFORTS

Pinewood Studios, situated just west of London, has been the main U.K. base for *Star Wars* productions for more than a decade. *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* and both of its sequels were filmed there, along with *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story* and *Solo: A Star Wars Story*, and more recent Disney+ series *Star Wars: Andor* and *Star Wars: The Acolyte*.

The historic site's skyline is dominated by the imposing 007 soundstage, built for the James Bond movies and utilized by blockbusters too numerous to list here, but that wasn't the focus of *Insider*'s visit to the studios in March 2024. We were far more interested in an anonymous collection of gray buildings just behind the vast edifice that could easily be mistaken for storage units. This is the home of Lucasfilm's Creature Shop, run by Neal Scanlan; a bespoke creative hub that, surprisingly, only took its current form relatively recently.

"Essentially, I had retired from the film business and decided that I would go and pursue other interests. Then *The Force Awakens* came along," explains Neal Scanlan, the Academy Award-winner who has guided the creature effects for many *Star Wars* productions since it's 2015 return to the silver screen.

WORDS: CHRISTOPHER COOPER & MARK NEWBOLD

"Phone calls went out and I brought back as many of the people that I used to work with as I could, along with people I hadn't worked with before, to build my team. That group grew over the next ten years of *Star Wars* projects, but it became obvious to me that the average age in the workshop was not as young as it could be."

With an eye on the future of his creative arena—practical effects and puppetry— Scanlan had realized that the next generation of talent needed to be found and given the opportunity to be trained in a production setting. "There's a finite number of people in this industry who do what we do, and most of them were working for me," says Scanlan. "It became clear that there was no new workforce coming in and we were reliant on the people who were already there. So, I began to think about how I could give new people that experience of going all the way through the process and onto a film set. The industry doesn't generally enable that sort of apprenticeship to take place. And as practical effects started to regain popularity thanks to the new *Star Wars* films, there became an even greater need for supply to meet demands. We needed to think about how we were going to move ahead."

"I BEGAN TO THINK ABOUT HOW I COULD GIVE NEW PEOPLE THAT EXPERIENCE OF GOING ALL THE WAY THROUGH THE PROCESS AND ONTO A FILM SET."

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STARTING FROM SCRATCH

Prior to his retirement, Scanlan had run his own creature effects company, but this had been long dismantled when *Star Wars* came calling. For *The Force Awakens* and subsequent movies, his visual effects departments were spread across various rented spaces at Pinewood, which had been far from ideal.

"Over the years we'd built successive workshops, installed all this wonderful machinery and equipment, hired it where we could, and fitted out facilities only to take them apart at the end of each project. It was time to reevaluate," Scanlan tells *Insider*. "I said, 'Right, let's completely start from the bottom, look at all the technologies and all the things that are out there, all the things that we haven't used, and all the things that we should be using. Let's look at every process that we do. If we can find a more current way of doing something, let's try it.

"We sat down and began to look at literally everything, from how we sculpt things, to how we mould them, to how we relate from one department to another. How we can come together as one department

02 Klaud's screen test for *The Force Awakens.*

03 A creature from *The Acolyte.*

04 Creature Shop crew members working on a new droid.

04

using as much technology as a team. It was an incredible exercise in reinventing ourselves, and by the time we'd finished we'd got to the point where we could literally say to people, 'If you have knowledge in a particular computer program, or you're good with Z Brush or any other 3D modeling program, or pattern making, or working with Fusion, you could come and work for us. You don't need to have been sculpting, mold-making, sewing, doing all these things for 10 to 15 years. If you're able to use these programs, we can include you. You can learn from us, and we can learn from you.' They can grow while already contributing, and right next to them is somebody who has been doing it for 30 years. They can be shoulder to shoulder with them and be a part of that person's team."

Scanlan's desire to bring new talent into the industry while building a state-of-the-art, unified facility evolved into a pitch that was presented to Lucasfilm and Disney.

"We did a presentation to Candice Campos, vice president of physical production at Lucasfilm, and showed a couple of examples of what we had done," recalls Scanlan. "We designed a character and built it all the way through to the end, completely within virtual reality, and showed how those processes could be pipelined out to the practical world. Our aim was to convince Disney and Lucasfilm to invest in a permanent, bespoke establishment where everything that they might need from us in the future will be in one place. Not only will it be a place that is light, bright, safe and clean, but it will also be a complete facility that's tapping into a new generation of talent and technologies that we can afford, and however small or large we'll be able to embrace them. Candice said yes, and thanks to her that's how we're sitting here right now."

05 Scanlan and director J.J.Abrams (center) with the D-O puppet.

06 Neal Scanlan puts a droid performer through their paces for *Solo: A Star Wars Story*.

05

06

WIDE OPEN SPACE

The buildings now occupied by Scanlan's team are bright and airy, and there is a tangible sense of creativity that permeates its workspaces.

"This was an old warehouse. We moved in and had it completely refurbished. Some of the buildings were constructed from the ground up," Scanlan tells *Insider* as he shows us around, beginning with rooms devoted to processes where chemicals or paints are involved. "Any work which is noisy, dusty,

KELNACCA' CURLS

The look of a Wookiee—described as a "walking carpet" by Princess Leia Organa—was defined by Peter Mayhew's Chewbacca in the original trilogy. Joonas Suotamo took on the role for the sequel trilogy, and now plays Kelnacca, the Wookiee Jedi Knight in *The Acolyte* who is an altogether more refined member of the species.

When *Insider* visited the Creature Cantina, hair and fur supervisor Jodi Corpe explained how much work went into maintaining the new costume.

"With Chewbacca, there were a few suits that got washed and styled on rotation, every couple of days. For *The Acolyte*, there's just the one suit, so there was always a team on-hand to make sure it was kept looking beautiful on set. We wouldn't ship the suit off to set without having a Wookiee stylist go with it," she reveals while methodically curling the costume's yak hair following its most recent hose-down. "Usually there would be two people working on this, one on either side. We had to train everyone so that we could all do the curls in the same way, otherwise what would happen is one side would look different to the other."

Kelnaca's mask on the creature shop's hair and fabrication workbench.

The Kelnaca costume from *The Acolyte*, part-way through styling.

or toxic takes place in these rooms. When that process is finished, we bring a piece back into the main workshop to work on it at a bench, so the idea is that the main room is where things get assembled, where things get tested, and where the final assembly comes together. That means everyone can see things being made and feel the thrill of seeing something come together.

"One of the things that we wanted was to have one big, open space," Scanlan continues as we enter the main workshop area. "There are no divides, no walls between departments. People can look across from one side of the room to the other and communicate with each other. We can laugh and joke, and the spirit can be there. If we play a piece of music, everyone gets to hear the music. There's a commonality. It makes for a much more interactive, creative, and active environment than when you partition things off. That also gives me the ability to wander around the room and communicate with everybody. The biggest part of my job, more than anything else is communication. It's about understanding what the director wants and making sure that gets communicated to the right departments to make sure we don't go down wrong avenues."

Despite the spaciousness of the main room, there is a clear delineation between departments. Before the teams moved in, this was planned by laying lengths of masking tape across the floor to determine the optimum proportions for each area. The animatronics and mechanical team sit close to the model making department, where assorted droids and other objects are constructed (and *Insider* is introduced to B2EMO from *Andor*). On the far side of the room, the hair and fabrication team are busy sprucing up Joonas Suotamo's Kelnacca costume from *The Acolyte*, the shop's most recent *Star Wars* project. These departments are all fluid and none of their benches are locked down, allowing each team to get bigger or smaller depending on the job.

"Many of the things that happen in the Mould Shop can have obnoxious fumes, so a lot of that work happens outside in bespoke buildings, but where we use materials that are water-based and much safer, we can do them in the workshop" says Scanlan. "We have a big center screen where we're able to have meetings, show clips, and talk about things collectively. Next to that is the

07

07 Ponda Baba was recreated by Scanlan's team for *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story.*

08 The Creature Shop under construction.

"EVERYONE CAN SEE THINGS BEING MADE AND FEEL THE THRILL OF SEEING SOMETHING COME TOGETHER."

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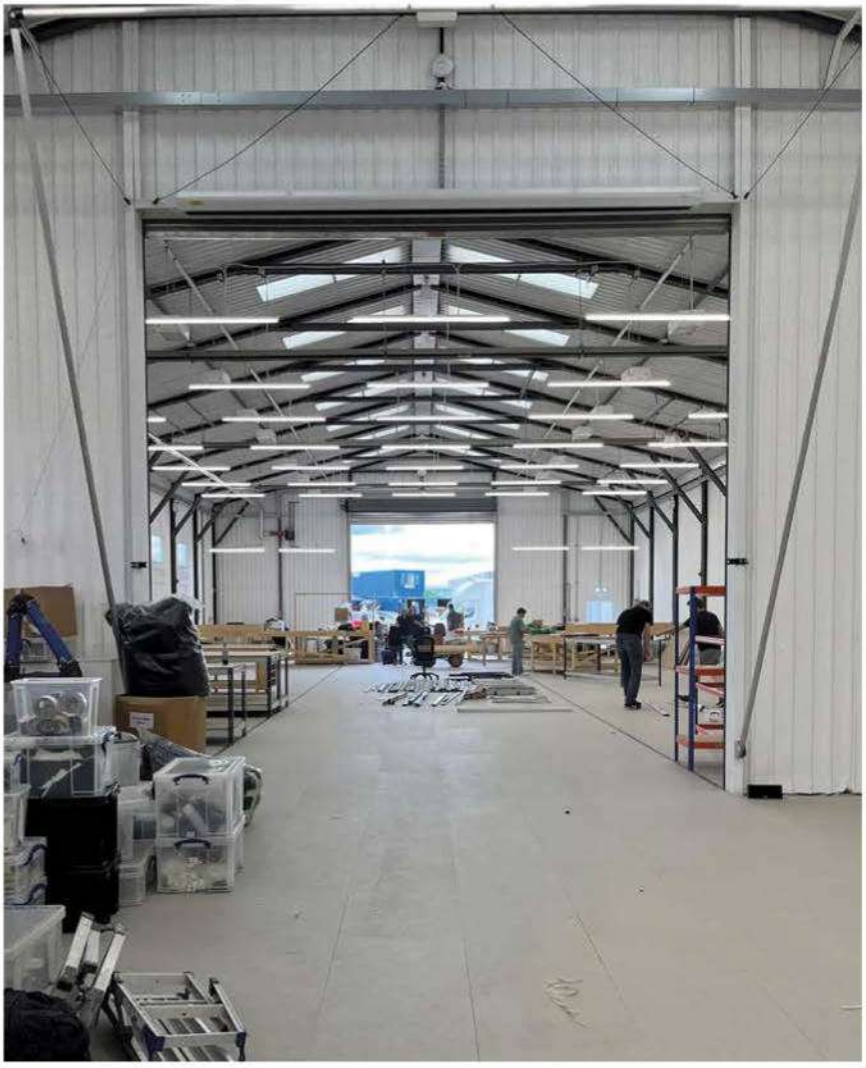

B2EMO

Droid operator and builder Lee Towersy points out some of B2EMO's features:

"B2EMO is Matt Denton and Josh Lee's baby. They designed it," says Lee Towersey. "There's a carousel which rotates that's operated by Josh. You don't really see it in the series, but he's basically meant to be a long toolbox, with instruments that can be selected from the carousel."

Although B2EMO appeared in two states in *Andor*—battered and "clean"—only one prop was actually built. Magnetic exterior panels could be swapped out to turn the droid from shiny and new to the more familiar dented and scratched version.

"He has three operators in all," Towersey continues. "There's Matt on the drive, Josh on the carousel, and Dave Chapman on the head. Matt put code in the programming so that when his body rotates, the head moves as if there's inertia. He's dialed that into the control on the drive as well, so B2EMO leans back and looks a bit more natural as he accelerates and stops. It's also got an all-terrain setting where the wheels extend, but you don't see that very often."

production department, which we call 'The Engine Room.' That's where Katie Newitt her team look after everything that needs to happen on a day-to-day basis, like budgeting and correspondence. Next to them is the scanning and software department, where they make sense of all the digital files; a lot of new magic takes place here! And then the concept team, who have a room of their own; open but dark enough so they can see their computer screens."

GETTING PRACTICAL

Shelves and display cabinets dotted around the workshop show the diversity of projects undertaken by Scanlan's crew. From miniature maquettes to a trio of astromechs nestling behind the workbenches; there are tactile, solid objects everywhere.

09 Creature concept designer Nick Tyrrell at work on a prisoner from *The Acolyte*.

10 The entrance to Lucasfilm's Creature Shop.

09

10

"What we always try to do with *Star Wars* is to start with the premise that we should do everything practically, although of course we can't," laughs Scanlan. "That's where visual effects can come in and assist, or can take over. It's the area in the middle that I find most exciting, when you start talking to a director about how you're going to achieve an effect on film. We used to do that with a 'show-and-tell' that was like a piece of theater. The director would come in and we would enact a moment with the idea being they would then gain an understanding of what was possible. If there was a creature on stilts, we would have it walk by. If there was a creature on all fours walking backwards, it would walk backwards. It was an effective way of showing what we could do. Nowadays, we tend to shoot our own test footage to better help the director understand what's possible with what we've made. We'll shoot something, cut a sequence together, and even do a little bit of digital replacement. They will take that or do a similar thing, but do it their way, which is great.

12

12 *The Acolyte*'s Bazil was a breakout Creature Shop creation.

13 Scanlan had a "Yoda moment" in *The Last Jedi*.

14 Jabba the Hutt embraces "the soul of practical effects," according to Scanalan.

13

"Leslye Headland was simply tremendous at that," Scanlan says of the creator of *The Acolyte*. "She knew the things that were really important to her, and from the start she had a real focus on where to go. I'm really pleased with what we achieved with her on *The Acolyte*. It's probably our strongest work yet. We took that creative journey with Leslye all the way through to what you see onscreen."

Having contributed so much to the current era of *Star Wars* storytelling, Scanlan still holds certain practical effects from the original trilogy in high regard.

"There are many great creature moments in the *Star Wars* saga, but two stand out for me," he says. "One is Yoda in *Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back*, and the other is Jabba the Hutt in *Star Wars: Return of the Jedi*. Both of them embrace what I call the soul of practical effects.

"THE JOY OF PRACTICAL EFFECTS IS THAT YOU *KNOW* THEY'RE PRACTICAL EFFECTS."

14

"The joy of practical effects is that you *know* they're practical effects. I know Yoda is a puppet and I am thrilled and overjoyed by the fact that he is a puppet, with the performance coming from Frank Oz, and that Mark Hamill is sat next to him. Every single part of that is wonderful for me, and I don't want it to be any different. I know there are people inside Jabba. I know he's made of rubber. But in that moment, I am right where I want to be, and I don't want to be taken out of it. That's the joy of the medium we work in.

"I dream of the moment where we can say, 'That is *our* Yoda moment, that's *our* Jabba the Hutt moment.' I'm proud of what we're doing, and I'm encouraged by what we've done. It's what keeps you driving forward. I honestly believe that we still haven't seen the best of what practical effects can do in a *Star Wars* film."

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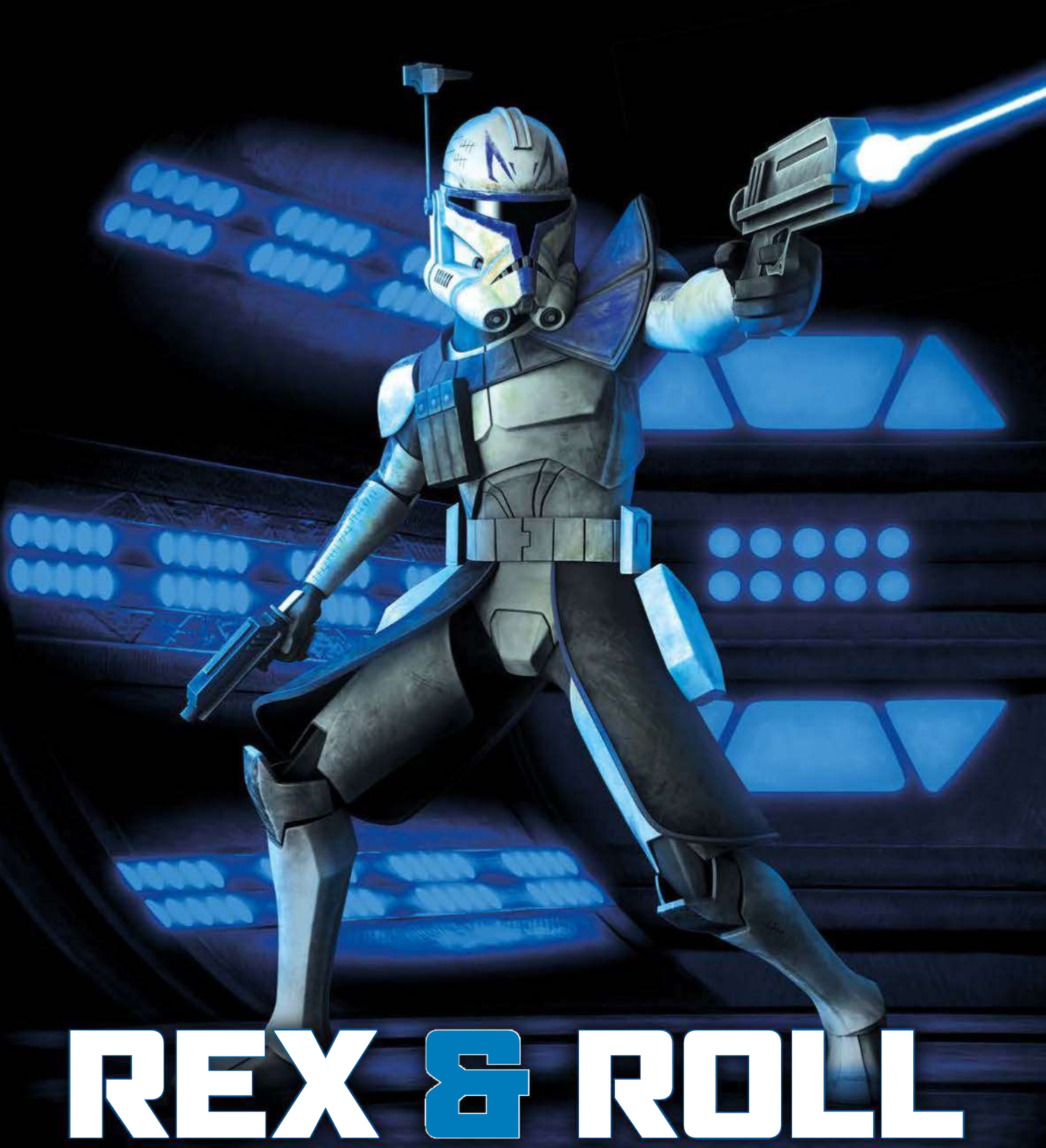


REX & ROLL

Clone Captain Rex, first introduced in *Star Wars: The Clone Wars*, has become a fan favorite, and a friend to many *Star Wars* characters over the years. From Anakin Skywalker's 501st second in command to Phoenix cell, he played a part in many of the saga's major events, achieving victories in two galaxy-wide wars. Here's a look at the top ten moments from Rex's career that truly prove why in his book, "Experience outranks everything."

WORDS: HARVEY HAMER

10

A TRUE LEADER

CT-7567—known as Rex—was a first-generation clone of bounty hunter Jango Fett. Promoted to captain after additional command training on Kamino, Rex earned the Mandalorian

Jaig Eyes honor symbol on his helmet from his instructors. However, it was only in the conflicts following the First Battle of Geonosis that the true extent of his skills were put to the test, including at the Battle of Arantara.

Rex bravely led his clone brothers forward from the front without his newly assigned Jedi general, Anakin Skywalker. He was injured, his helmet's faceplate shattered, but Skywalker came to his rescue. The Jedi general admitted it should have been he who led the assault in the first place, saying, "A true leader always leads from the front." Anakin's words reinforced lessons Rex had already learned, and formed the basis of trust and burgeoning friendship between the two men.

09

WHO'S THE YOUNGLING?

Another early Clone Wars battle saw Rex hesitantly paired with a second Jedi that would change his life forever. Skywalker's new Padawan, Ahsoka Tano, soon gained Rex's friendship and respect through her actions during the Battle of Christophsis.

While Captain Rex and General Kenobi provided a diversion, Tano and her master exhibited great bravery and resourcefulness in taking out an impenetrable deflector shield activated by Separatist General Loathsom. Rex valiantly held the line until the shield came down and reinforcements arrived.

08

DEFENDING HIS HOME

As the war progressed, the Separatists grew bolder, attacking the very heart of the Republic's army, the clone birthplace and training center on Kamino. General Grevious and Asajj Ventress led specialist droid forces through the blockade, in the hope of stealing the clones' prime DNA sample. Rex and Commander Cody aided recent 501st members Fives and Echo in defending the clone cadet barracks.

Kamino was saved, but not without the sacrifice of the knowledgeable maintenance worker 99, a physically impaired clone. His heroic deeds would live on, though, as the ideal of a true solider in Rex and other clones' minds, and as the namesake for Clone Force 99, a group of desirably defective clones otherwise known as the Bad Batch. Fives and Echo were promoted to ARC troopers and would become Rex's closest brothers.

07

IT'S TREASON, THEN

Months turned to years and Rex proved his loyalty and honor again and again. However, on Umbara, the captain had to determine what those words really meant. When temporary 501st commander Jedi Pong Krell lead from behind, ordering high-casualty full-frontal assaults, Rex had no choice but

to retreat and make split-second decisions to save lives. Loyal to his men, Rex attempted to take the blame for an unauthorized mission to destroy the enemy's supply ship. This only led to Krell orchestrating a full-out friendly fire battle.

The only honorable action left for Rex was to lead a coup against Krell, who had secretly turned to the dark side. With the Umbarans closing in, Rex was hesitant to execute Krell but another soldier, Dogma, stepped in to perform the deed. The captain's honor and loyalty remained intact, and the seeds of the Clone underground were planted.

06

THE SEARCH FOR TRUTH

Years into the fighting, Separatist Admiral Trench's repeated victories against the Republic stronghold of Anaxes made Rex suspect the enemy had access to specific counterattacks he'd drawn up with Echo, previously thought dead in a rescue operation on Lola Sayu.

Rex, Anakin, and the Bad Batch traced Echo to the Techno Union's base on Skako Minor. When they found him, half-droid, pale, thin, and connected by wires into a stasis chamber, Rex was the one to unplug his friend, who managed to lead the squad to safety and assist in the retaking of Anaxes by infiltrating Trench's dreadnought. Without Rex's speech to Skako Minors' locals and trust and support for his brother, neither would've been possible.

05

VICTORY & DEATH

Rex was promoted to commander of the 332nd, a 501st division created to serve with ex-Jedi Ahsoka Tano to aid the Mandalorian resistance. The clones' helmets usually disguised their expressions, but the joy and admiration at uniting with their young commander again was clearly expressed through the addition of orange decorations to their helmets to match Tano's facial markings.

After hard battles against his loyalists, the once-Sith Maul was captured and imprisoned aboard a *Venator*-class Star Destroyer. When Order 66 activated inhibitor chips implanted in all clones, causing them to turn on the Jedi, Rex managed to resist his programming long enough for him to realize what was going on and tell Tano to find Fives. Rex eventually succumbed, and with shaking hands joined the clones firing on Ahsoka from all sides.

When Ahsoka found Rex's previous grievance report on Fives's death and learned of the inhibitor chip conspiracy, she was able to remove Rex's chip. When he awoke, his first horrified instinct was to shoot his men to save Ahsoka.

Maul set the ship on a collision course with a moon, forcing Rex and Ahsoka to leave all the others on board as they escaped. Realizing what had become of his brothers, Rex cried. Once the dust settled on the crash site, the two friends buried the dead, creating a memorial of helmets before heading to Padmé Amidala's funeral and going their separate ways. Rex first headed to warn Cut Lawquane, a clone deserter with a family who would need protecting.

04

TRUTH & CONSEQUENCE

Rex set up a fledgling network of clones waking up to what had been done to them, including the Bad Batch, whose inhibitor chips he helped remove. In return, the squad freed Clone Commando Gregor from a clandestine training facility.

When Rex headed to Coruscant to rescue a contact, Slip, he could only save Senator Riyo Chuchi from assassination by a mysterious brainwashed clone. She'd gone after Slip to ask him to testify to the Senate that it was the Empire that had destroyed Tipoca City on Kamino.

The Batch helped Rex retrieve Slip's log and send it to Chuchi, but an Imperial vice admiral took the fall, and the clones acting blindly under his orders were used as further proof to phase them out of the Empire's army. Rex unintentionally sealed the fate of all clones, playing into Palpatine's pre-laid plan. Echo once again said goodbye to Clone Force 99, mirroring his departure on Anaxes, to join the former captain.

03

DO THE RIGHT THING

As Rex's Clone underground grew, they set up a base in the ruins of a monastery, the site of Rex's first mission with both Skywalker and Tano after Christophsis. But it came under attack by another clone assassin who was hunting for the Bad Batch's young clone, Omega. The base was left burning and crumbling, and the surviving clones were cut off by an enemy squad led by Wolffe, a fellow clone commander Rex knew from the war. "As your brother, I'm asking you to do the right thing," Rex implored. Wolffe commanded his men to stand down and let the survivors leave.

02

AN OLD FRIEND

More than a decade into the reign of the Empire, Rex was convinced his days as a solider were over. Retirement meant living on a retrofitted AT-TE walker with Wolffe and Gregor. However, Rex's knowledge of the Outer Rim and leadership skills brought rebels to his door, including Jedi Kanan Jarrus, sent by Ahsoka Tano. After the initial distrust between the men on either side of Order 66 dissipated, Wolffe, desperate to protect his squad from Imperial reprisal, alerted the Empire to the rebels' presence. Rex had to convince him once again that the war was over and that they were free men.

Under Rex's commmand, and with the help from some former Jedi, just like old times, his plan worked. The three Imperial AT-AT walkers that the Imperials sent after them fell, proving once and for all that clones were the better class of soldier. Rex joined the rebels and reunited with Ahsoka.

01

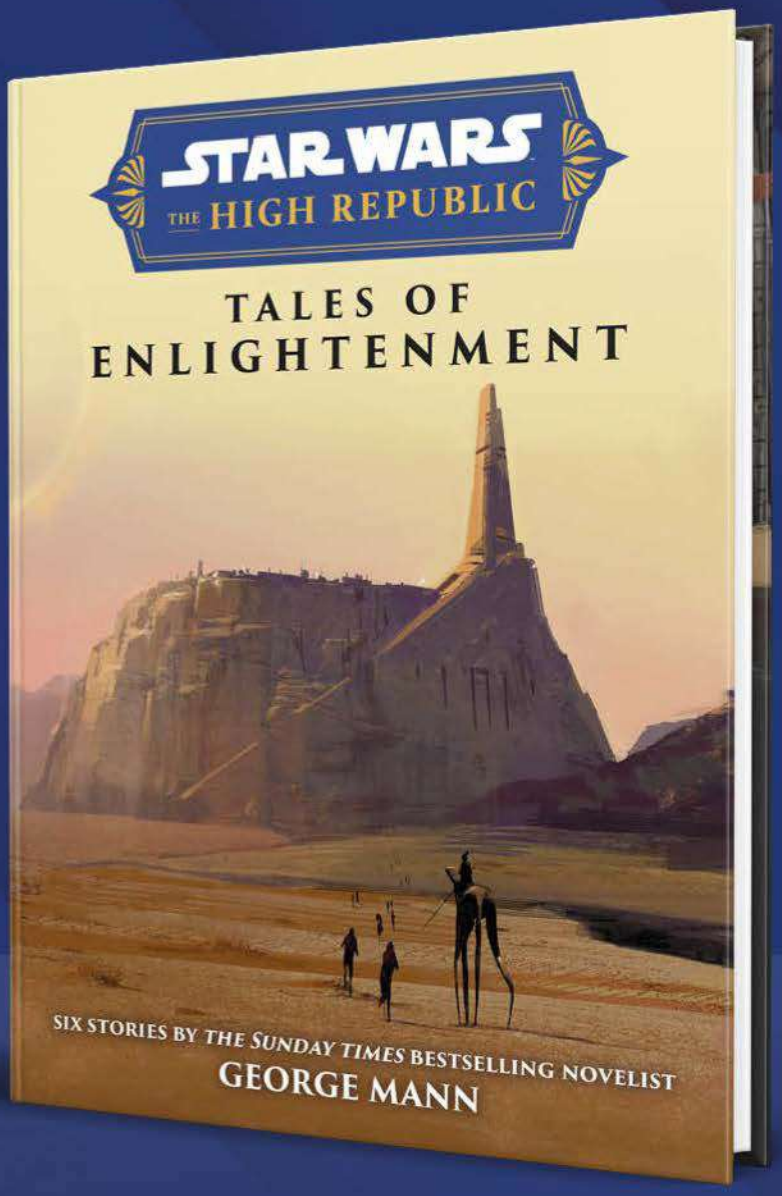
THE LAST BATTLES

Rex lead the rebels to stashes of B- and Y-wing fighters and set up Chopper Base on Atollon. Plagued by flashbacks, he was forced to lead one last battle against a holdout of droids on Agamar. When the Empire, the true enemy of clones and droids alike, appeared, foes united to escape tyranny and end the war on their own terms.

Rex revisited Geonosis as his old enemies faced extinction, rescued double-agent Alexsandr Kallus, and played a pivotal role in the defense and evacuation of Chopper Base.

He recruited his brothers for one last important mission, not for the Rebellion but for young Jedi Ezra Bridger's home planet. He fought his way into the Lothal Dome and took a team to raise the planetary shields. However, Gregor was lost in the process. His last words: "It was an honor to fight with you for something we *chose* to believe in."

ORIGINAL STORIES BY THE *SUNDAY TIMES* BESTSELLING AUTHOR GEORGE MANN



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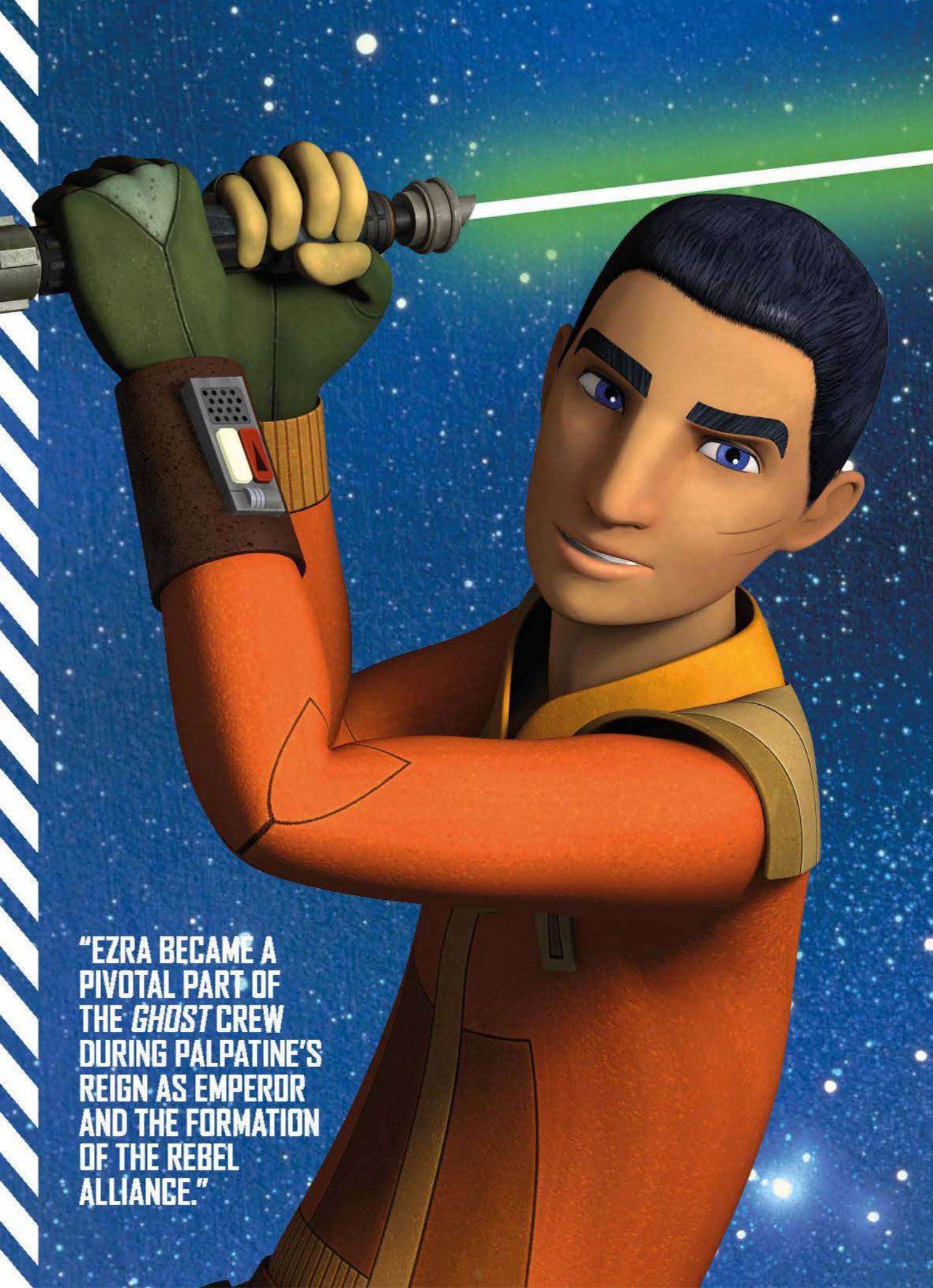

"EZRA BECAME A PIVOTAL PART OF THE *GHOST* CREW DURING PALPATINE'S REIGN AS EMPEROR AND THE FORMATION OF THE REBEL ALLIANCE."

BORN TO REBEL

WORDS: AMY RICHAU

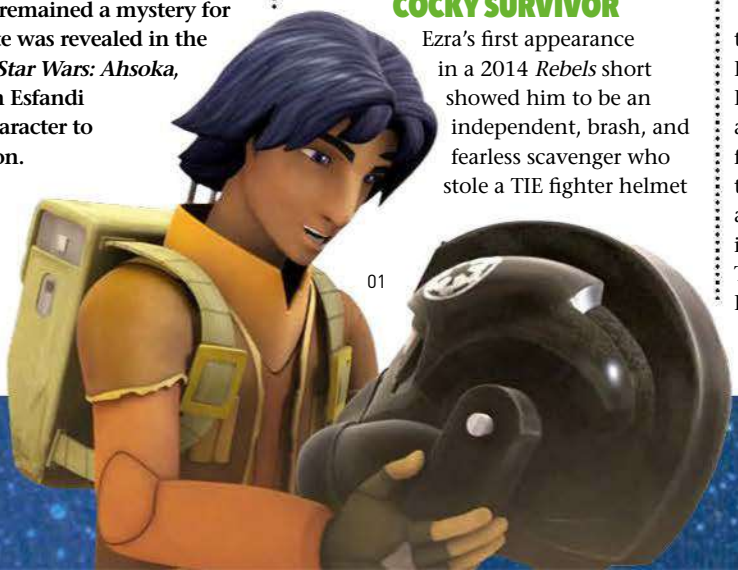
Ezra Bridger, a character whose experiences and relationships in many ways reflect the story of the rise and fall of the Galactic Empire, was first introduced in *Star Wars Rebels*. Voiced by Taylor Gray, Ezra quickly became a fan-favorite, whose sudden disappearance remained a mystery for years. Ezra's fate was revealed in the Disney+ series *Star Wars: Ahsoka*, in which Eman Esfandi brought the character to life in live action.

Born on Empire Day, the first day of the Galactic Empire, Ezra was a pivotal part of the *Ghost* crew during Palpatine's reign as Emperor and the formation of the Rebel Alliance. While the relationships he formed were integral to his story, much of Ezra's life, as an orphan on Lothal and later trapped on Peridea in another galaxy entirely, was spent alone.

COCKY SURVIVOR

Ezra's first appearance in a 2014 *Rebels* short showed him to be an independent, brash, and fearless scavenger who stole a TIE fighter helmet from a downed pilot on Lothal so he could sell the Imperial tech on the black market. Abandoned after the Empire arrested his parents, Mira and Ephraim, for broadcasting anti-Imperial messages, Ezra had to fend for himself. Living in an abandoned communications tower, Ezra scraped by as best he could, stealing things when necessary.

Ezra met the crew of the *Ghost* in the series pilot episode, when he stole Imperial cargo from under the noses of Kanan Jarrus, Garazeb "Zeb" Orrelios, and Sabine Wren. It didn't take long for Kanan to see that the kid from the streets of Lothal had some special abilities, but Ezra didn't immediately fit in with Hera Syndulla's crew of rebels. Thrown together while escaping Lothal Imperials, Ezra questioned why the *Ghost* crew risked their lives to help

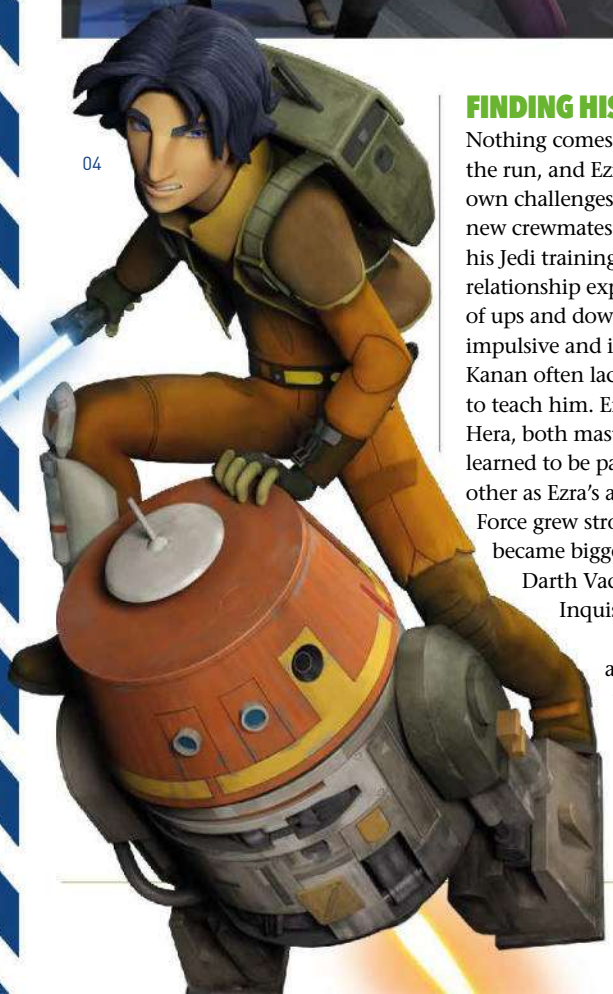


01 Ezra Bridger (voiced by Taylor Gray in *Star Wars Rebels*).

strangers, and was quick to steal Kanan's Jedi holocron from his cabin. Ezra's hard shell showed its first signs of cracking after his new crewmates risked their lives to rescue him from an Imperial ship. Shortly after, Ezra revealed to Hera that his parents were not waiting at home for him. After Ezra helped to rescue a group of Wookiees from Imperial enslavement and Kanan saw that Ezra was able to open his holocron, Jarrus offered Ezra a place in the *Ghost* crew—and the chance to train with him in the ways of the Force.

02

03



04

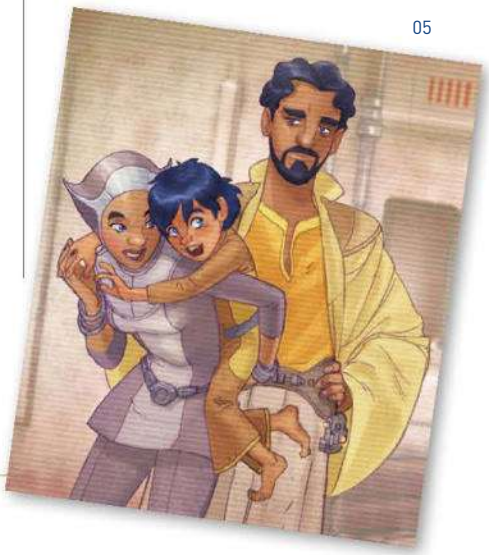
FINDING HIS PLACE

Nothing comes easy for rebels on the run, and Ezra experienced his own challenges fitting in with his new crewmates and embracing his Jedi training. Ezra and Kanan's relationship experienced plenty of ups and downs as Ezra was impulsive and impatient, and Kanan often lacked the confidence to teach him. Encouraged by Hera, both master and apprentice learned to be patient with the other as Ezra's abilities with the Force grew stronger—and they became bigger targets for Darth Vader's Jedi-hunting Inquisitors.

The *Ghost* crew, also known as the Spectres, continued to fight against the Empire and help those in need. After settling in with his new crew, Ezra revealed that his parents were arrested by the Empire, and that he didn't know where they were being held or if they were even alive. But he didn't let his sadness and anxiety about his parents' fate stop him from fighting against the Empire. During a mission on Lothal, Ezra broadcast his own rebellious message, encouraging everyday citizens to take a stand against

"EZRA WAS IMPULSIVE AND IMPATIENT, AND KANAN OFTEN LACKED THE CONFIDENCE TO TEACH HIM."

05



02 The *Ghost* crew saved many lives.

03 Kanan and Ezra battle the Grand Inquisitor.

04 Bridger and Chopper, the *Ghost* crew's cantakerous astromech.

05 The only surviving image of Ezra with his parents.

Imperial occupation. When Ezra later learned that his parents were killed in a prison breakout, he leaned on his new family to help him process his grief.

As the years and many missions together went by, Ezra's tense and competitive early relationship with Zeb evolved into a strong friendship between the two, helped in many ways by Hera, who ordered them to work together on several missions to work out their initial differences. Ezra and Sabine also grew close over the years. During a mission on Lothal, Sabine retrieved and repaired a holodisk so Ezra could have an image of his parents, knowing how much that would mean to him. Later, Ezra helped train Sabine with the Darksaber (despite Kanan's reluctance to teach her) and later supported her choice to stay on Mandalore to try and rescue her father.

06 Maul and Ezra unlock the secrets of a Sith holocron.

07 Ezra helped train Sabine Wren on how to wield the Darksaber.

06

07

DARK-SIDE TEMPTATIONS

As Ezra's abilities grew, it became harder and harder for him to hide from Inquisitors. On Malachor, a planet where the Jedi and Sith once battled, Ezra found himself drawn to the dark side. After uncovering the entrance to a Sith temple, Ezra was separated from Kanan and Ahsoka and joined by Maul, who at first hid his true identity. Ezra, seeing Maul as a potential ally, was swayed by the latter's promises to share knowledge that would allow him to seek revenge against the Sith. Shortly after, Maul turned against the Jedi, blinding Kanan with his lightsaber, while Ahsoka engaged in a battle with Darth Vader which, at the time, seemed to result in her death. Rather than lose himself in guilt, Ezra learned from the experience and worked with Kanan to save the rest of the *Ghost* crew when they were later taken ▶

CONNECTING WITH CREATURES

One of Ezra's many Force abilities was connecting with creatures. In the Season One episode "Gathering Forces," Ezra calmed an aggressive group of fyrnocks on the military base Fort Anaxes. In the Season Two episode "The Call," Ezra connected and was able to communicate with a purrgil on a *Ghost* mission to get fuel for their ship. Later, during the Battle of Lothal, Ezra entrusted fellow rebel Mart Mattin with a plan to call on a herd of purrgil by transmitting Frequency Zero into space to help fight off Thrawn's forces.

hostage by Maul. In the process, Ezra rejected Maul's offer to take him on as his apprentice, choosing to fully embrace the light side of the Force. As the disparate rebel cells started to unite into a unified Rebel Alliance, Ezra solidified his place in the fight against the Empire, with one opponent taking center stage: Grand Admiral Thrawn.

LETTING GO

During the next two years, Ezra played a large role in many rebel successes, while confronting the losses of several loved ones. After fighting in the Battle of Atollon and rescuing Hera from the clutches of the Empire, Ezra and the *Ghost* crew suffered their most devastating loss when Kanan sacrificed himself to ensure the rest of the crew could safely escape. Kanan's memory stayed close to Ezra. Soon, he crossed paths with a Loth-wolf named Dume who led Ezra to the entrance of a world between worlds. Inside this mystical realm where time and space intersect, Ezra was able to save Ahsoka from her battle with Vader on Malachor, preventing her almost certain death. Realizing that he may have the power there to save Kanan as well, Ezra sought out a portal to his master, but realized, with Ahsoka's guidance, that he had to let go of his mentor to honor Kanan's choice.

ONE LAST LESSON

During the Battle of Lothal, Ezra agreed to surrender to Thrawn in order to stop the Grand Admiral's bombing of Capital City. Later, Emperor Palpatine used Ezra's love and longing for his parents to try and manipulate Ezra into opening another portal into a world between worlds. While Ezra was tempted by the images of his parents seemingly welcoming him back into their arms, he stopped himself from falling for Palpatine's tricks and destroyed the portal. In his most selfless act, Ezra then stormed onto Thrawn's Star Destroyer, the Chimaera, to see his secret plan play out. Ezra stayed on the ship as purrgil surrounded and trapped him and Thrawn before jumping into hyperspace. Hera, Zeb, and Sabine later played a recording left by Ezra in which he told them that he couldn't have wished for a better family.

08

"EZRA SOLIDIFIED HIS PLACE IN THE FIGHT AGAINST THE EMPIRE, WITH ONE OPPONENT TAKING CENTER STAGE... GRAND ADMIRAL THRAWN."

09

10

08 Ezra relived the death of Kanan Jarrus in a world between worlds.

09 Grand Admiral Thrawn versus Ezra Bridger.

10 A vision of Ezra's parents.

REUNION

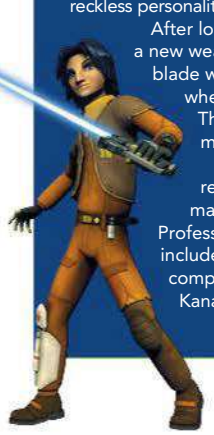
Ezra's whereabouts remained a mystery during the early years of the New Republic. But his friends—especially Sabine—remain focused on finding him and bringing him home. On the planet Seatos, Sabine

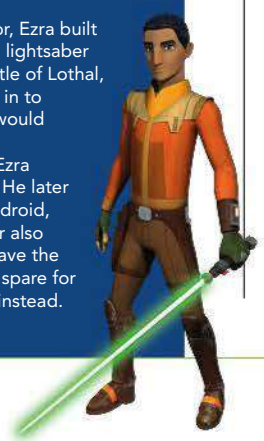
THE MANY LIGHTSABERS OF EZRA BRIDGER

Not losing your lightsaber was a lesson drilled into Padawan learners. But Ezra never had a traditional apprenticeship as a Jedi, and his adventures saw him attached to multiple lightsabers. Ezra's built his first lightsaber—a blaster hybrid that perfectly suited his impulsive, and at times reckless personality—after finding a kyber crystal in a Jedi temple on Lothal.

After losing this lightsaber in a battle with Darth Vader on Malachor, Ezra built a new weapon, this time without a blaster attachment. Ezra's second lightsaber blade was green instead of blue, and served him well until the Battle of Lothal, where Thrawn forced Ezra to surrender. Before turning himself in to Thrawn, Ezra left his lightsaber with Sabine, who years later would modify and train with it as Ahsoka Tano's Padawan.

When Ezra and Sabine were finally reunited on Peridea, Ezra refused to take back his lightsaber, insisting it was hers now. He later made a third lightsaber with the help of the Mark IV architect droid, Professor Huyang. Powered by a blue kyber crystal, this lightsaber also included an identical emitter to Kanan Jarrus' weapon. Huyang gave the component to Ezra, telling him that he had been keeping it as a spare for Kanan, and that it made sense for Kanan's apprentice to use it instead.





WHERE'S EZRA?

With the liberation of Capital City in Lothal from the Empire, the Season Four finale of *Star Wars Rebels*, "Family Reunion — and Farewell," brought closure to the series. Yet one question remained: Where did Thrawn and Ezra go after the purrgil jumped the Chimaera into hyperspace? And would he ever make it home?

It didn't take long for #WheresEzra to become a popular hashtag on social media. Fans desperate to know where their favorite Jedi had disappeared to made "Where's Ezra" buttons and "Bring Ezra Home" shirts. *Star Wars* Celebration Chicago in 2019 also hosted a "Where's Ezra" group photo event, organized by Ezra superfan Johnamarie Macias. In the end, audiences would have to wait six years before they found out where Ezra had been when "Far, Far Away," Episode Six of *Ahsoka*, premiered on Disney+.

chose to give a secret map to a renegade former Jedi named Baylan Skoll in the hopes of finding Ezra, even though she knew that her choice could also lead to the return of Thrawn. When she eventually found her friend on the planet Peridea in another galaxy, the man she was reunited with was a far cry from the teenager she'd first met on the streets of Lothal. Calmly leaning against a transport, Ezra caught Sabine's attention by remarking, "I knew I could count on you. Took you long enough!" Despite being on his own on a strange planet for so long, Ezra showed no sign of anger, bitterness, or regret, having chosen instead to make friends with the local Noti population and deepen his connection to the Force. This choice was all the more impressive considering Ezra had no way of knowing if his prior sacrifice had led to the defeat of the Empire or if he would ever return home.

After being reunited with Ahsoka and building a new lightsaber, Ezra, Ahsoka, and Sabine took on Thrawn's Night Troopers in an effort to reach the Chimaera and stop his imminent departure. With the help of Sabine's reignited Force connection, Ezra leapt onto Thrawn's ship, although he had to leave his friends behind. Once back in his own galaxy, and always game for an undercover mission, Ezra stole a shuttle and Night Trooper armor and headed to the New Republic frigate *Home One*. Spectre-6 had finally made his way home. What would happen next, only time would tell.

11

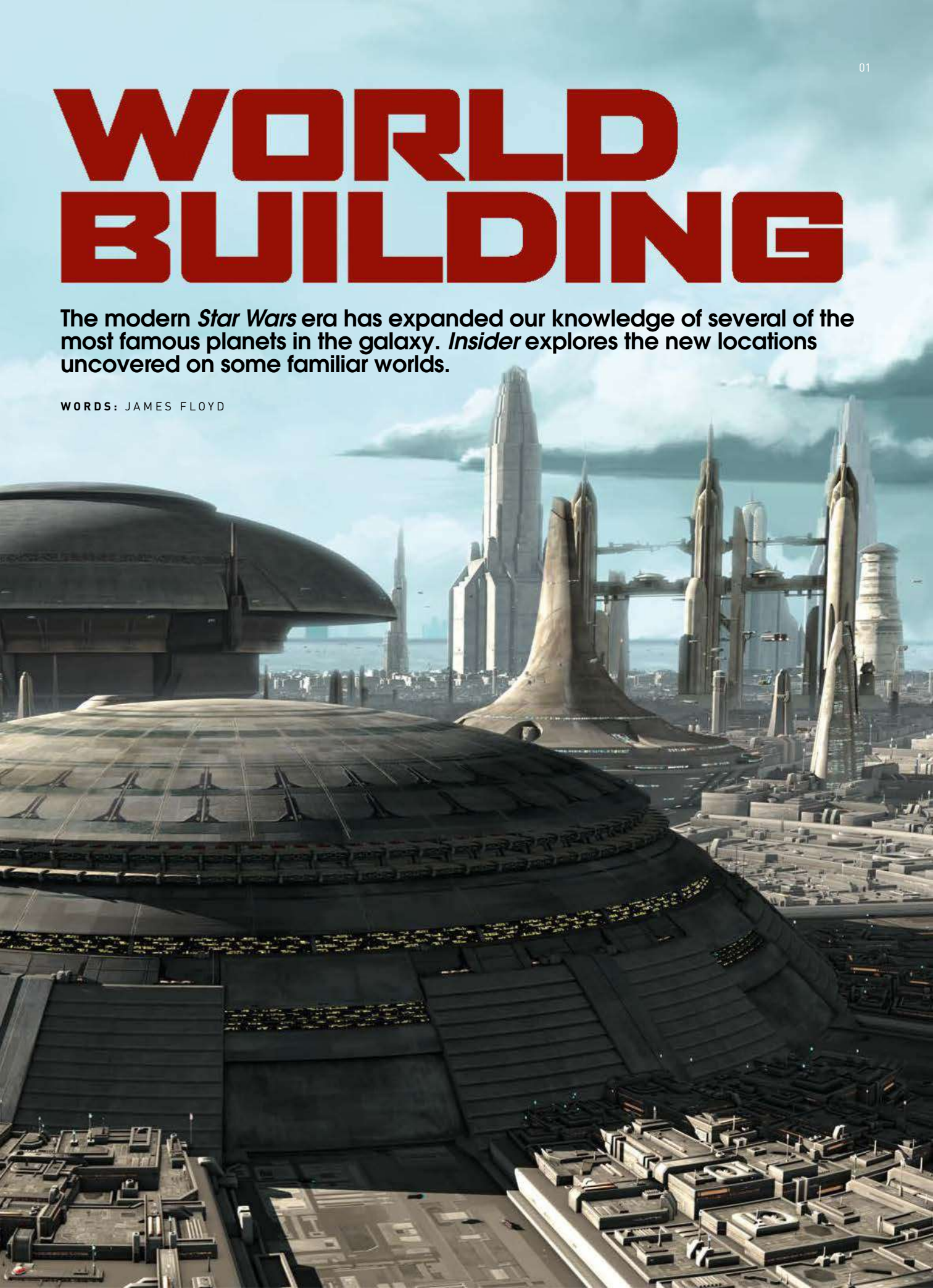
11 Eman Esfandi as Ezra in *Ahsoka*.

12 Ezra Bridger's return from exile.

WORLD BUILDING

The modern *Star Wars* era has expanded our knowledge of several of the most famous planets in the galaxy. *Insider* explores the new locations uncovered on some familiar worlds.

WORDS: JAMES FLOYD



From Tatooine to Mustafar, the *Star Wars* movies have introduced audiences to a variety of visually rich planetary locales, filled with landscapes and architecture that convincingly evoke an other-worldliness while feeling real and tangible. However, given the often-breakneck pace of the space fantasy series, we've rarely dwelt long enough on each world to ever truly begin to understand them. That all changed with *Star Wars: The Mandalorian*, which took us back to the desert world of Tatooine and began to unwrap a civilization on the planet that was far more complex than we'd previously known, where it was revealed to have its own multifaceted society beyond moisture farming, crime, and podracing.

This began a tradition of literal world building across the Disney+ live-action and animated series' that have added to *Star Wars* lore in the almost five years since. While shows including *Star Wars: The Book of Boba Fett*, *Andor*, *Obi-Wan Kenobi*, and *The Bad Batch* have introduced many new planets for us to explore, their episodic natures have also lent filmmakers the opportunity to afford more screentime to the likes of Coruscant and Corellia, giving us new details about their geography and their inhabitants, along with deeper cultural and political insights.

01 The spires and canyons of Coruscant.

TOWNS OF TATOOINE

Luke Skywalker once told C-3PO that if there was a bright center to the universe, his homeworld was the planet it was farthest from. As far as the audience was concerned, it was our first experience of a world in the galaxy far, far away, and as such has always been a source of wonder. First revisited in *Star Wars: Return of the Jedi*, and then again in the prequel movies, Tatooine has been a hub for all sorts of new storytelling in recent years.

The Book of Boba Fett showed us that the areas of Mos Espa we saw in *The Phantom Menace*, such as Watto's junk shop and the slave quarters where the Skywalkers lived, were merely on the outskirts of a huge city. While most of the metropolis spread across a vast plain, its sprawling heart sat in a canyon surrounded by steep cliffs, home to City Hall and Garsa Fwip's upscale club and casino, Sanctuary. The streets that sprawled across the cavernous pit were equally dense on the plateau above it, where a massive spaceport complex saw giant passenger liners land on a plain beyond the cliffs, showing that the city was a far busier transport hub than the small docking bays seen in *Star Wars: Attack of the Clones* had previously suggested.

During the reign of Bib Fortuna, Jabba the Hutt's successor as daimyo of Tatooine, control of Mos Espa's districts was split between three crime families. The Workers District was the domain of the Aqualish, while Trandoshans took charge of the city center, and the Klatooinians ruled the upper sprawl and spaceport (presumably including Watto's shop and the podrace arena). This fragile alliance held until the Pyke Syndicate attempted to muscle in after Boba Fett replaced Fortuna as daimyo. The Pyke bombing of Sanctuary and their alliance with the three crime bosses and mayor Mok Shaiz precipitated a city-wide battle for control. In the end, Boba Fett's forces, comprised of a mod biker gang, volunteer fighters from Freetown, a bounty hunter, and his pet rancor, defeated the Pykes, ridding the planet of their insidious spice operation.

Mos Espa wasn't the only Tatooine settlement to get more screen time. Mos Eisley returned, albeit with a little less scum and villainy. In *The Mandalorian*, Peli Motto and her pit droid crew repaired Din Djarin's *Razor Crest* at her workshop in Hangar 3-5, and later souped up a

"IT WAS OUR FIRST EXPERIENCE OF A WORLD IN THE GALAXY FAR, FAR AWAY, AND AS SUCH HAS ALWAYS BEEN A SOURCE OF WONDER."

02

03

02 The streets of Mos Espa.

03 Mos Espa as seen from above.

04

05

Naboo N-1 starfighter on his behalf. Mando also stopped by Chalmun's Cantina a few times, and we learned that the infamous establishment from *Star Wars: A New Hope* now not only allowed droid patrons but was tended by a reprogrammed EV-9D9 unit.

Tosche Station—Luke Skywalker's favorite venue to waste time with his friends—finally got its moment in the twin suns in *The Book of Boba Fett*, years after scenes filmed in the hangout for *A New Hope* had ended up on the cutting room floor. Boba Fett took out a Nikto biker gang, the Kintan Striders, who had been harassing the regulars, including Luke's old friends Fixer and Camie.

The bleak deserts of Tatooine were also bought to life with new people and places, and return visits to some familiar locations. *The Book of Boba Fett* opened with Fett's escape from the repulsive intestines of the Sarlacc pit, which he later returned to (and destroyed) while searching for his missing beskar armor. We took a deeper dive into Tusken culture as Boba went from being their captive to becoming an accepted member of their tribe. He participated in several Tusken rites of passage, including making his own his own gaderffii, or gaffi, stick and undergoing a dream quest.

"FREETOWN, THE ONE-STREET SETTLEMENT PREVIOUSLY KNOWN AS MOS PELGO, SHOWCASED THE HARSH FRONTIER LIFE IN *THE MANDALORIAN* SEASON TWO."

After the Pykes sent a biker gang to slaughter his adopted family, Fett took control of Fortuna's palace as headquarters for his not-so-criminal empire. We saw more areas of the building than we had in *Return of the Jedi*, including the sail barge hangar, kitchens, and rooms used by Fett as living quarters, where he'd made space for a bacta tank to aid his recovery from acid wounds caused in the Sarlacc's stomach.

Freetown, the one-street settlement previously known as Mos Pelgo, showcased the harsh frontier life in *The Mandalorian* Season Two. Sheriff Cobb Vanth kept order and protected the locals against Tusken attacks. When a krayt dragon menaced the town, Din Djarin used his knowledge of Tusken sign language to broker an alliance between the nomads and the townspeople against the massive monster, finally shown on screen in the flesh after only being hinted at with a skeleton in *A New Hope*. Though a fragile peace was established, the tiny town faced more trouble when Cad Bane gunned down Vanth and his deputy and claimed the town for the Pykes. Undeterred, the Freetown garrison joined Fett in fighting to eradicate the Pyke presence on Tatooine.

04 Boba Fett fought to escape a fate worse than death inside the Sarlacc.

05 The Third Sister paid a visit to Anchorhead while hunting Jedi.

06

06 Freetown was a tiny frontier outpost.

While *Obi-Wan Kenobi* took us to one very familiar Tatooine location, the series also paid a visit to another place previously only mentioned in *A New Hope*: Anchorhead. Revealed as a moderately sized town, much smaller than the likes of Mos Eisley and Mos Espa, Obi-Wan caught the daily hovertrain from Anchorhead to his job of slicing up sand whales out in the desert at makeshift tibidon stations. The Third Sister later visited Anchorhead, where she threatened Owen Lars in an attempt to flush out a Jedi-in-hiding named Nari—managing to miss the presence of Kenobi entirely.

At this time, the Jedi Knight and his eopie were living in a cave in a sandstone hill on the Dune Sea, where he could keep a close eye on the Lars moisture farm. In the movies, the farm had seemingly been surrounded on all sides by salt flats, but it was now revealed that a rocky crag was not far away and was used by Obi-Wan as a vantage point to watch young Luke through his macrobinoculars. The homestead became a battleground when Owen and Beru tried to repel Reva, who was intent on killing the Skywalker boy as revenge against Darth Vader.

ALDERAAN AVENUES

Seen only from space in *A New Hope* (as a whole planet then a shower of rocky particles!), the peaceful planet of Alderaan got the royal treatment in *Obi-Wan Kenobi*. The capital city of Aldera grew from being a cluster of white towers among snowy peaks in *Star Wars: Revenge of the Sith* to a sprawling city in a forested valley on the end of a wide lake.

Narrow and majestically tall, the city's skyscrapers mimicked the hues and shapes of the surrounding Aldera mountains, while snaking, elevated roadways wound through verdant gardens and stands of lenall trees, making the towering buildings appear to spring straight from the valley floor. A busy spaceport extended out over the lake, where the Organas had a private docking platform. Inside the Royal Palace, we got a glimpse into the Organa family's orchestrated life, with a reception attended by Breha's sister's family, including young Leia's condescending cousin, Niano. But outdoors, Leia asserted her independence by climbing trees and playing in the conifer forest—unaware that Vect Nokru and his Black Mask gang were nearby and preparing to kidnap her.

07

07 The splendor of Aldera, capital city of Alderaan.

SHIPYARDS OF CORELLIA

08

Years later, *Ahsoka* took us back to Han's homeworld. Although the New Republic now controlled the Santhe Shipyards that had once built Star Destroyers, not a great deal had changed in terms of the planet's heavily industrialized backdrop. Ahsoka Tano and Hera Syndulla traced an assassin droid to one yard formerly owned by Morgan Elsbeth during the reign of the Empire. When the pair questioned the refit of a massive hyperdrive engine core that wasn't intended for a New Republic ship, Imperial loyalists among the workforce turned on them.

Corellia was namechecked in the movies as Han Solo's homeworld, so it was only natural that the opening act of *Solo: A Star Wars Story* should take us on a swift flyby of the planet. As Han and Qi'ra fled from Lady Proxima's gang, we glimpsed the concrete and metal landscape of Coronet City close up, from the crime boss' underground lair to its factories and spaceport.

08 Corellia was a shipbuilding hub for the Empire.

09 Shipyards once owned by Morgan Elsbeth.

09

HOME ON KAMINO

In *Attack of the Clones*, Kamino was the production site and training ground for the Republic's clone troopers, but in *The Bad Batch* it was reframed as a home when Clone Force 99 returned to Tipoca City following Order 66. It also made an appearance during flashbacks in *The Book of Boba Fett*, in Fett's nightmarish dreams of his lonely childhood there, tormented by visions of violent waves and his father's frequent trips away. For the Bad Batch, though, Kamino was a happier place. Clone Force 99 enjoyed quarters separated from the regular clones and scrapping with "regs" in the canteen.

Later in the series, as Governor Wilhuff Tarkin and Vice Admiral Edmon Rampart began replacing the clones with conscripted stormtroopers, the Kaminoans feared for their fate. Prime Minister Lama Su was arrested and all of Kamino's cities and cloning facilities were destroyed by Rampart's aerial bombardment, but not before the storyline uncovered areas not seen in *Attack of the Clones* or *The Clone Wars* as the Bad Batch attempted to escape the city's destruction.

10

10 Tipoca City on Kamino.

"IN *THE BAD BATCH* IT WAS REFRAMED AS A HOME WHEN CLONE FORCE 99 RETURNED TO TIPOCA CITY FOLLOWING ORDER 66."

KASHYYYK

11

All we saw of the Wookiee homeworld in *Revenge of the Sith* was the beachfront battlefront where Yoda escaped Order 66. *The Bad Batch* visited the planet during the Imperial era as they helped deliver a young Wookiee Jedi named Gungi to his people. Arriving near a village, the clones ran into trouble with a colony of netcasters, before Gungi convinced the large native spiders of their peaceful intentions. When Trandoshans and stormtroopers approached with flamethrowing tanks, Gungi learned how to commune with the massive wroshyr trees and led the Batch, fellow Wookiees, and netcasters to defeat their foes and save the forest.

11 A Trandoshan wreaking havoc on Kashyyyk.

12 The Bad Batch helped a group of Wookiees defend their forest.

12

MAKING MORE OF MUSTAFAR

13

The lava world of Mustafar first appeared as the site of the fateful duel between Obi-Wan Kenobi and Darth Vader in *Revenge of the Sith*, then home to Vader's castle in *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story*, and finally where Kylo Ren recovered the Sith wayfinder in *The Rise of Skywalker*.

Obi-Wan Kenobi included flashbacks to the epic duel between Kenobi and Vader, revealing an additional glimpse inside Fortress Vader as the Sith Lord left his bacta tank to receive members of the Inquisitorius in his throne room.

13 Darth Vader
14 used his castle on Mustafar as his personal seat of power.

14

THE CAVERNS OF CORUSCANT

15

15 ISB HQ on Coruscant.

16 The peak of Umate was the focal point of Coruscant's Monument Plaza.

The ecumenopolis that served as the capital for the Republic and then the Empire, and finally as a key administrative hub for the New Republic, got capital treatment in *Andor*, and showed new facets in *The Bad Batch* and *The Mandalorian*. First glimpsed in the special edition of *Return of the Jedi*, the planet was one big city in the prequel trilogy, with the spotlight on the Jedi Temple, the Senate, and entertainment districts.

Andor took us to all corners of the somewhat dehumanizing megacity, from its dizzying heights to its lowest depths.

The Chandrilan embassy, with its expensive décor, served both as the venue for fancy parties and the residence for the Mothma family. Elsewhere in the daylight-infused upper levels was Luthen Rael's gallery, Galactic Antiquities and Objects of Interest, where he stocked rare artifacts to sell to the wealthy and clandestinely coordinated his rebel network with associate Kleya Marki. Mon Mothma frequented the shop, where, as a regular customer, she could confer with Luthen away from prying eyes.

The gleaming headquarters of the Imperial Security Bureau (ISB) could also be found on the surface. Unlike the usual dark colors of Imperial installations, the ISB headquarters featured white corridors and conference rooms—perhaps a reminder of their ideological purity in service to the Empire. The structure also held the austere offices of sector supervisors and investigators, interrogation chambers, and a massive datavault.

16

Syril's workplace in the Fuel Purity section of the Imperial Bureau of Standards showed the contrast between the bureaucratic machine running the Empire and the isolation of individuals serving as a cog in its monstrous wheels.

While airspeeders were used to traverse long distances, many walkways connected pedestrians across buildings and complexes, and provided a quiet rendezvous point for Kleya and Vel Sartha. Architectural brutalism dominated the apartment building where Eedy Karn and her disgraced son Syril lived, deep in the city where sunlight could only be glimpsed in gaps between buildings, quite different to Mon Mothma's upper-level home.

Plunging further into darkness, the lower levels were home to the planet's underclass, the poor, and the lost. It was the ideal haven for illicit activities, such as Luthen Rael's secret meeting with Lonni Jung, his ISB mole, on a dingy but very private maintenance level.

During the Empire's early days, seen in *The Bad Batch*, lower-level back alleys and abandoned buildings also served as secret meeting points for Rex's Clone underground and other dissidents like Senators Riyo Chuchi and Bail Organa. The Martez repair shop, first seen in *The Clone Wars* and located in a massive shaft on Level 1313, was utilized as a hideout for the underground when on Coruscant. Other places weren't so safe—79's, a cantina catering for clones, was where an assassin killed Cade before he could tell his clone brother Slip about Vice Admiral Edmon Rampart's involvement in the destruction of Tipoca City.

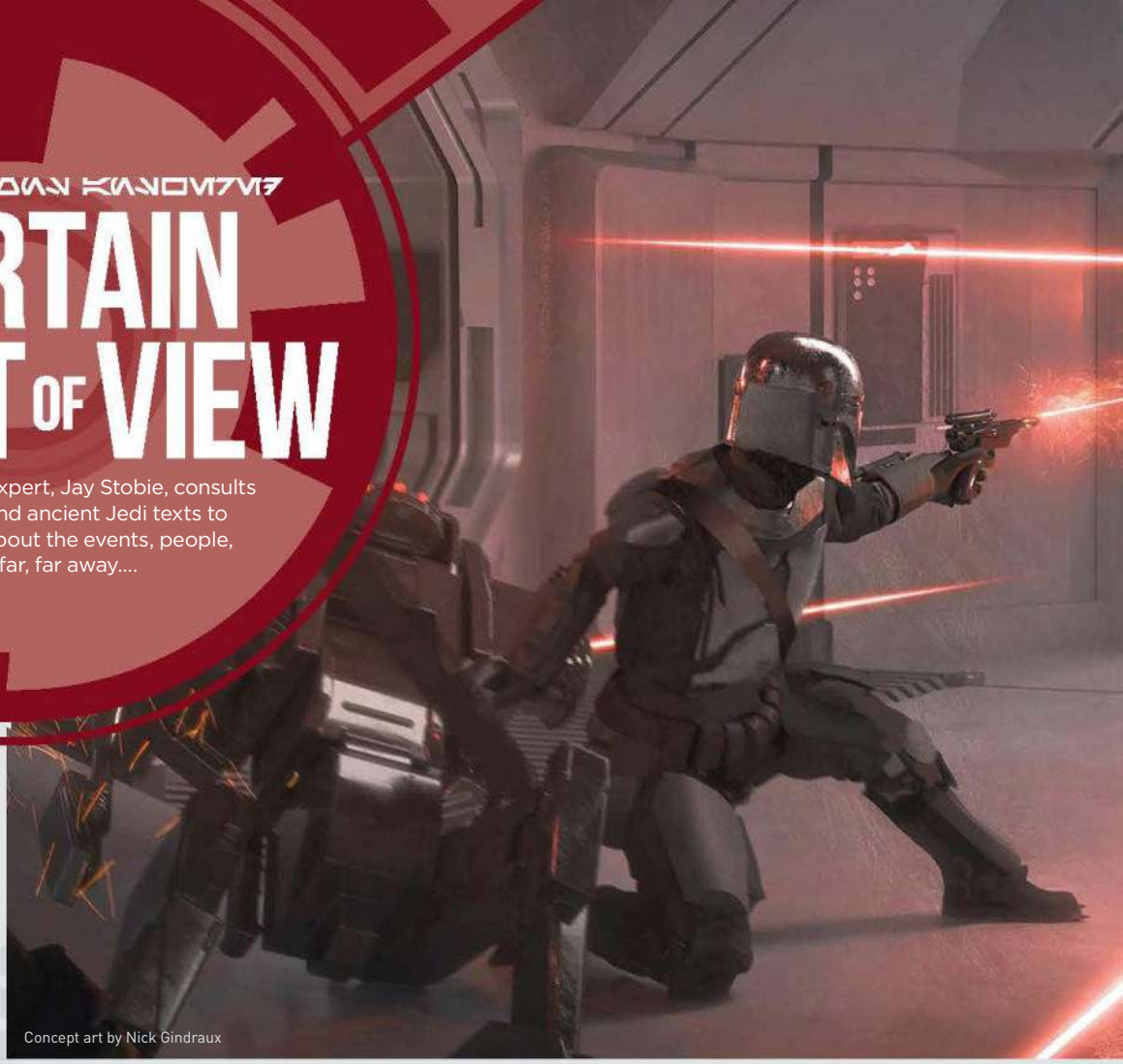
By the time the New Republic had supplanted the Empire, as seen in *The Mandalorian*, Coruscant hadn't noticeably changed. Blocky skycrapers that had once housed the Empire's administrative functions now served the same purpose for the New Republic. This included the Congenial Archive office where ex-Imperial scientist Penn Pershing was employed, and the Requisitions office where Elia Kane was working for Colonel Tuttle when he denied Carson Teva's authorization request to tackle Nevarro's pirate problem.

Kane and Pershing lived in modest apartments in Amnesty Housing with fellow parolees. After giving a speech about his amnesty at the Galaxies Opera House to Coruscanti socialites, Pershing met Kane, who took him sightseeing at Monument Plaza. Originally depicted in a piece of Ralph McQuarrie concept art, the park's focal point was the top of Umate, Coruscant's highest mountain peak, now buried beneath layers of city. Kane coaxed Pershing to restart his cloning research, and the two travelled by hovertrain to a scrapyard to steal lab equipment from a decommissioned Star Destroyer to that end. Kane betrayed Pershing to the authorities, and the last we saw of him was at a de-indoctrination facility where the New Republic used Imperial torture technology to recondition prisoners.

Like we said, nothing much had changed on Coruscant.

A CERTAIN POINT OF VIEW

Our resident *Star Wars* expert, Jay Stobie, consults his library of holocrons and ancient Jedi texts to answer your questions about the events, people, and places of the galaxy far, far away....



Concept art by Nick Gindraux

"Most guards at Imperial facilities were living beings, but the *Palwick* prison ship in *Star Wars: The Acolyte* and the New Republic prison ship in *Star Wars: The Mandalorian* were guarded by droids. Why did the Empire do things differently?"
Marcus Fleming, Cardiff, United Kingdom

You've made a keen observation, and the answer to your query can be traced all the way back to the Clone Wars. While the Galactic Empire did deploy a significant number of protocol droids, astromechs, MSE "mouse" droids, and other units designed for specific tasks, your point highlights the disparity between the Empire's reliance on human personnel and the Confederacy of Independent Systems' vast droid armies.

Manufactured by the millions, Separatist droids outnumbered their organic counterparts in the Grand Army of the Republic. In addition to casualties among clone troopers, the prolonged war left battered planets and traumatized civilians in its wake. With that devastation in mind, many galactic citizens became wary of artificial beings. Coupled with the fact that a lot of people lacked a reverence for droids in the first place—even the enlightened Bail Organa took no issue with having C-3PO's memory wiped—this distrust of droids manifested in everything from the Mos Eisley Cantina not serving

Local Leaders

Greef Karga

Originally known for his work in the Bounty Hunters Guild, High Magistrate Greef Karga oversaw Nevarro's transformation from a desolate hideout to a burgeoning trading hub. Building additional homes and structures, establishing a school, and welcoming IG-11 as the settlement's new marshal all fell under his purview.

Cobb Vanth

The Empire's fall left Mos Pelgo vulnerable to takeover by the Mining Collective, but Cobb Vanth's discovery of Boba Fett's lost beskar armor allowed him to establish law and order by forcibly evicting the infiltrators. The territory was eventually renamed Freetown.

Boba Fett

A former bounty hunter who was reformed by his time with the Tuskens of Tatooine, Daimyo Boba Fett replaced Bib Fortuna on Jabba the Hutt's old throne and assembled a team to control Mos Espa. Fett and his allies successfully defeated the Pyke Syndicate and ended the corrupt reign of Mayor Mok Shaiz.

"their kind" to Din Djarin expressing a distaste for mechanical beings. Although the Empire *did* protect its Vandor facility with Viper probe droids and deployed KX-series security droids on planets like Jedha, Scarif, and Niamos, these combat support roles were limited and a far cry from the scores of Separatist B-1 battle droids, vulture droid starfighters, and other models.

New Ideals

We've outlined the reason droid armies fell out of favor during the Empire's reign, but why did the New Republic decide to reverse course and rely so heavily on automation? ▶

Bo-Katan Kryze

The sister of the late Duchess Satine Kryze, Lady Bo-Katan Kryze nearly gave up on her dream of resettling Mandalore. Fortunately, Bo-Katan's run-ins with Din Djarin led her to become the rightful owner of the Darksaber, setting a chain of events into motion that saw her forces defeat Moff Gideon and reignite Mandalore's Great Forge.

Gorian Shard

Not all leaders had the wellbeing of the locals on their mind, as Pirate King Gorian Shard launched a devastating assault on Nevarro that wrought havoc upon innocent civilians. Only the intervention of Din Djarin, Bo-Katan Kryze, and a Mandalorian covert prevented Gorian Shard from claiming the community for himself.

Mon Mothma, who eventually rose to become chancellor, guided the nascent New Republic by focusing on democratic ideals and avoiding the militaristic nature of its predecessor. Considering the Rebel Alliance had worked so hard to overthrow the Empire, it was only logical that its chancellor wished to safeguard against future authoritarianism. This philosophy resulted in the Senate's passage of the Military Disarmament Act, legislation which slashed the New Republic military by 90 percent and sent many decorated Alliance personnel into retirement.

The reduced investment in its military caused staffing shortages for the remaining New Republic ships and outposts, which in turn meant that many facilities relied on an increase in automated systems or, as in the case of the prison ship in question, full automation. However, even with these droids, countless vessels were still decommissioned due to the New Republic's general disdain for the centralized power wielded by the Empire. Although the New Republic Defense Fleet was capable of maintaining a consolidated force to protect its capital and the Senate, many outlying and independent systems relied upon localized sector defense forces for security. The New Republic's "hands off" approach to controlling its territory also prompted planets to look to their own magistrates, marshals, and other regional officials in times of need.

Alas, these factors coalesced together and ensured that poor Lieutenant Lant Davan had to stand alone as the only organic officer when Migs Mayfeld and his cohorts confronted him in the New Republic prison ship's control room. This may not have offered much consolation to the slain officer, but Davan's death was not the only pitfall which emerged from the New Republic's emphasis on automation. A smaller fleet, along with an unwillingness to brandish it, prompted the New Republic to deny General Hera Syndulla's request to send ships to Seatos upon rumors of Grand Admiral Thrawn's imminent return. This attitude also allowed the First Order to fester, and that government's emergence nearly subjugated the galaxy once again.

DEMILITARIZED MOMENTS

4 ASW4:
Not long after the Battle of Endor, the Alliance to Restore the Republic formally became the New Republic, a government which aimed to defeat the Imperial remnants and chart a fresh course for the galaxy at large.

5 ASW4:
Championed by Mon Mothma, the Galactic Concordance peace treaty officially ended the Galactic Civil War and preceded the Military Disarmament Act, which was passed by the New Republic Senate and resulted in demilitarization.

9 ASW4:
Din Djarin boarded a New Republic prison ship to free the Twi'lek outlaw, Qin. Despite its dangerous cargo, the vessel was primarily crewed by droids that the Mandalorian bounty hunter dispatched with his armored arsenal.

28 ASW4:
Leia Organa began organizing like-minded supporters in an effort to halt the First Order's growing influence. This force would become known as the Resistance, which utilized surplus equipment supplied by sympathetic senators.

34 ASW4:
The First Order struck at the heart of the New Republic, employing the Starkiller Base superweapon to eradicate the Hosnian system and wipe out the fledgling government's seat of power. The downsized New Republic fleet also fell victim to this attack.

35 ASW4:
Unable to counter the First Order and Sith fleets with a massive armada of its own, the Resistance relied on an irregular Citizens' Fleet gathered by Lando Calrissian and Chewbacca to turn the tide against Emperor Palpatine at the Battle of Exegol.

The Separatists' Strategy

The Confederacy of Independent Systems opted for droid armies for several important reasons. Preferring mindless loyalty over flesh-and-blood improvisation, the Separatists enjoyed the ability to easily control their forces. The preexisting droid security forces, built by the likes of the Trade Federation and the Separatists' other business entities, permitted them to quickly raise these armies.

The Separatists had a financial advantage, as its members' corporate wealth and the Banking Clan's credit reserves furnished them with the ability to invest in their droid foundries. Droids were also cheaper to produce and lacked the extensive production timeline associated with clone troopers.

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Send your in-galaxy queries to starwarsinsider@titanemail.com with the subject header, "A Certain Point of View."

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FLIGHT OF THE NITE OWL

Cosplaying as the mighty Mandalorian Koska Reeves

"I've always wanted to cosplay, but the introverted part of me always held me back," shares Lem. "One day I decided to go for it, because you only live once. *Star Wars: The Mandalorian* is my favorite show, so I knew that was what I wanted my first cosplay to be inspired by."

Considering how many intriguing characters have been introduced by the series, Lem had a wide range of

Photos by Mike Price

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cool characters to choose from. "I was chatting with a friend, trying to decide who I'd cosplay," recalls Lem. "They suggested that as I resemble her, Koska Reeves would be perfect. The rest is history."

What drew Lem to Mandalorian warrior Koska Reeves? "I fell in love with the Nite Owls the moment I saw them on screen. I instantly loved the way Koska interacted with Boba Fett during Season Two. I remember getting total female empowerment vibes from her!"

Lem's remarkable Koska cosplay has drawn high praise from other fans. As a bonus, Lem had the chance to meet Mercedes Varnado, the actor who played Koska in *The Mandalorian*. "I was starstruck, so I don't remember word for word what was said," recalls Lem. "She was amazing, super kind, and she complimented me on my Koska suit. I definitely feel blessed, and I'm excited to see what's next for me in the cosplay world."

Lem with Mercedes Varnado.

ARTISTS' ALLEY

Talented *Star Wars* fans share their amazing drawings inspired by the galaxy far, far away....

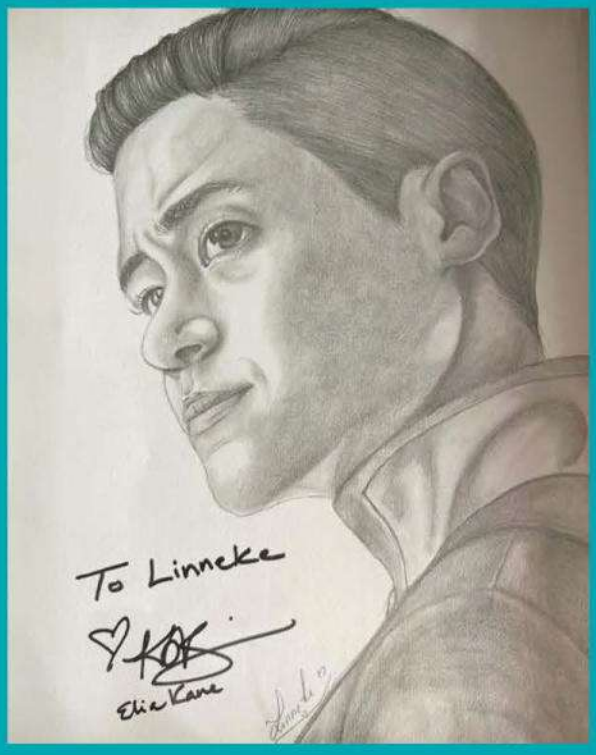
01 "MORGAN ELSBETH" AND "EZRA BRIDGER" BY EDDIE CALATAYUD IV

With *Star Wars* and its visual aesthetic serving as his artistic inspiration, Eddie Calatayud IV sees his art as a celebration of the stories that shaped his childhood. *Star Wars: Ahsoka* proved particularly captivating, as it allowed Eddie to blend nostalgic elements like Ezra Bridger with the excitement of unknown characters like Morgan Elsbeth. Eddie describes the result as "creating art that pays homage to the classics while embracing the innovative spirit that continues to drive the franchise forward."

02 "ELIA KANE" BY LINNEKE

As much as fan artist Linneke loves Din Djarin and Grogu in *Star Wars: The Mandalorian*, she particularly enjoyed the show's focus on Elia Kane in "Chapter 19: The Convert."

"I immediately fell in love with the character," says Linneke, who was lucky enough to have her drawing of Elia autographed by Katy O'Brian, who portrayed the Imperial officer in the series.



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MADS MIKKELSEN & ANDY SERKIS

01 Adam Rose (right) and his partner Kenberly Martinez pose with Mads Mikkelsen, who portrayed Galen Erso in *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story.*

For Adam Rose and his partner Kenberly Martinez, *Star Wars* Celebration quickly demonstrated why it is a place where dreams are fulfilled.

After all, where else would you find international film star Mads Mikkelsen, who portrayed Galen Erso in *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story*, and legendary actor Andy Serkis, whose *Star Wars* credits include Kino Loy in *Andor* and Supreme Leader Snoke in the sequel trilogy, in the same place?

"Meeting both Mads Mikkelsen and Andy Serkis was a completely surreal experience," explains Adam. "I've long been a fan of Serkis, since his *Lord of the Rings* days, so I couldn't pass this up." Fortunately for the two fans, both actors lived up to their high expectations. "These guys are both two of my favorite actors and meeting them didn't disappoint at all."

02 Adam Rose and Kenberly Martinez smile beside Andy Serkis, best known to *Star Wars* fans as Kino Loy from *Andor* and Supreme Leader Snoke in the sequel trilogy.

A FETT-TASTIC JACKET

Using upcycled materials to make special accessories

"I love to sew and to be creative, which is why I like to make *Star Wars* clothes for myself, be they sewn, crafted, or crocheted," explains Anika Kötz. As with many fans, Anika ranks Boba Fett as one of her favorite characters, and let her fascination for the bounty hunter ignite her imagination. The result? An incredibly unique jacket!

"The jacket was an upcycling project. It was secondhand, and the fabrics came from old jeans, a protective tarp, and production offcuts," explains Anika. "I tried to include the look of his helmet and the striking details of Fett's armor."

Of course, that isn't the only craft that has emerged from Anika's love for the *Star Wars* galaxy. Rebel-inspired denim earrings showcase the fan's true allegiance. "The earrings are made from old jeans, and since I'm actually on the side of the rebels, of course I embroidered their symbol," shares Anika. "I made them for my first Comic-con in 2022 and, since I like big earrings, I just had to make some with the *Star Wars* look." Anika also enjoys fitting out clothing, such as a black fanny pack using *Star Wars* fabrics, to give items a new lease of life.

"I've always loved fantasy and sci-fi, and when I happened upon the *Star Wars* novels after seeing the classic trilogy on TV for the first time, I was blown away. I just love the vastness of the stories," she remarks. "I still love the cohesion of the characters and the continuation of the story in the novels."

PASS ON WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNED

The Founding of an East Coast Saber Guild

In 2012, Matthew Procaccini and his wife Adrienne watched the Saber Guild (a not-for-profit *Star Wars* costuming group that specializes in choreographed lightsaber shows) perform at San Diego Comic-Con, and were inspired to start the guild's first East Coast chapter in New York. "That show's production values alone were the motivation we needed to reach out and start our own temple," Matthew recounts.

Many obstacles were overcome, including locating rehearsal spots, doing outreach to attract new members, and building a rapport with established fan groups in those areas—not to mention the personal aspect. "The most challenging aspect of my participation in Saber Guild was always balancing being a 'boss' to my friends," says the fan. "For anyone who's ever done theater before, you know how close you get to your fellow performers."

The hard work paid off for Matthew, who went on to help create chapters of the Saber Guild in New Jersey and Washington State. "When we'd watch people who were strangers a month prior, giggling in the corner, or when a once timid member would show off a rocking fight, we knew we were creating a safe space for people to grow," he says.

While Matthew and his wife remain passionate about the franchise, they have stepped back from the height of their activities, (although they still attend the occasional class and performance) to focus on nurturing the next generation of fans. "We have two children now," shares Matthew, "so we are funneling most of our geekiness to them."

The Star Wars Archive

The behind-the-scenes story of a galaxy far, far away....

01

MAKING FACES

The Mos Eisley Cantina scene in *Star Wars: A New Hope* truly cemented the idea that the film was set in a galaxy far, far away.

Audiences marveled alongside Luke Skywalker at the sheer diversity of alien eyes, bizarre faces, and twisted expressions that turned towards him as the naive farmboy dared to enter the seedy joint with two droids in tow. Thus began the tradition of practical masks and puppetry being used to bring the creatures of the *Star Wars* galaxy to life.

Some of them, designed and made by the likes of Industrial Light & Magic's Phil Tippett, Doug Beswick, Jon Berg, Laine Liska, and Rick Baker, have since become familiar and recurring species in *Star Wars* productions, often having been revisited to take advantage of new technologies in materials and animatronics, such as the wampa ice creature constructed for the Special Edition of *Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back*.

02

01 (Left to right) ILM's Phil Tippett, Jon Berg, Doug Beswick, and Rick Baker among masks and hands from the Mos Eisley Cantina in *A New Hope*.

02 Wendy Morton, puppeteer in the ILM Creature Shop, readies a newly created wampa mask for filming in *The Empire Strikes Back* Special Edition.

03 Kay Freeborn taking stock of an array of Ewok heads.

05

06

07

04 One of the many C-3PO faces sculpted by Liz Moore closely resembles an early concept by artist Ralph McQuarrie.

05 C-3PO face plates from the original trilogy, including (left to right): An injection-molded prototype made for *The Empire Strikes Back*; The *A New Hope* face plate with added dent; a stunt version made for the fall from Jabba's sail barge in *Return of the Jedi*; and the face plate vandalized by Salacious Crumb.

06 *A New Hope* production designer John Barry and director George Lucas try to attach an unfinished head prototype of C-3PO to the body.

07 Anthony Daniels in his C-3PO costume.

YODA UNMASKED

While Yoda was primarily realized for *The Empire Strikes Back* using a puppet sculpted by Stuart Freeborn (above) and performed by Frank Oz, another actor appeared on screen as the diminutive Jedi Knight.

Deep Roy, who later playeed Droopy McCool and an Ewok in *Star Wars: Return of the Jedi*, wore a detailed Yoda mask and full costume for long shots where Yoda is seen walking across the Dagobah swamps.

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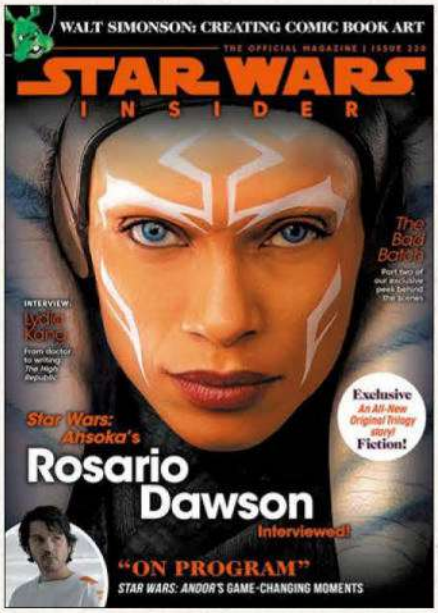

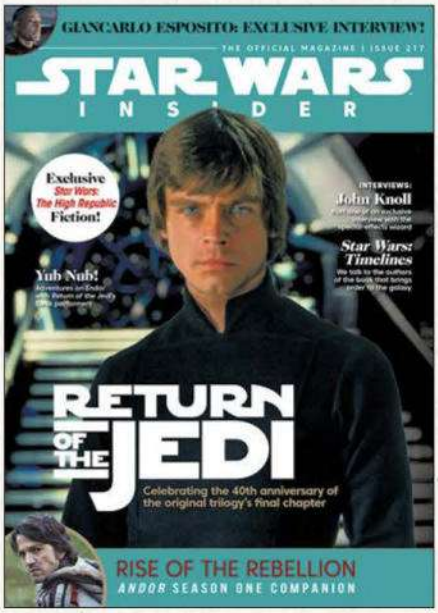
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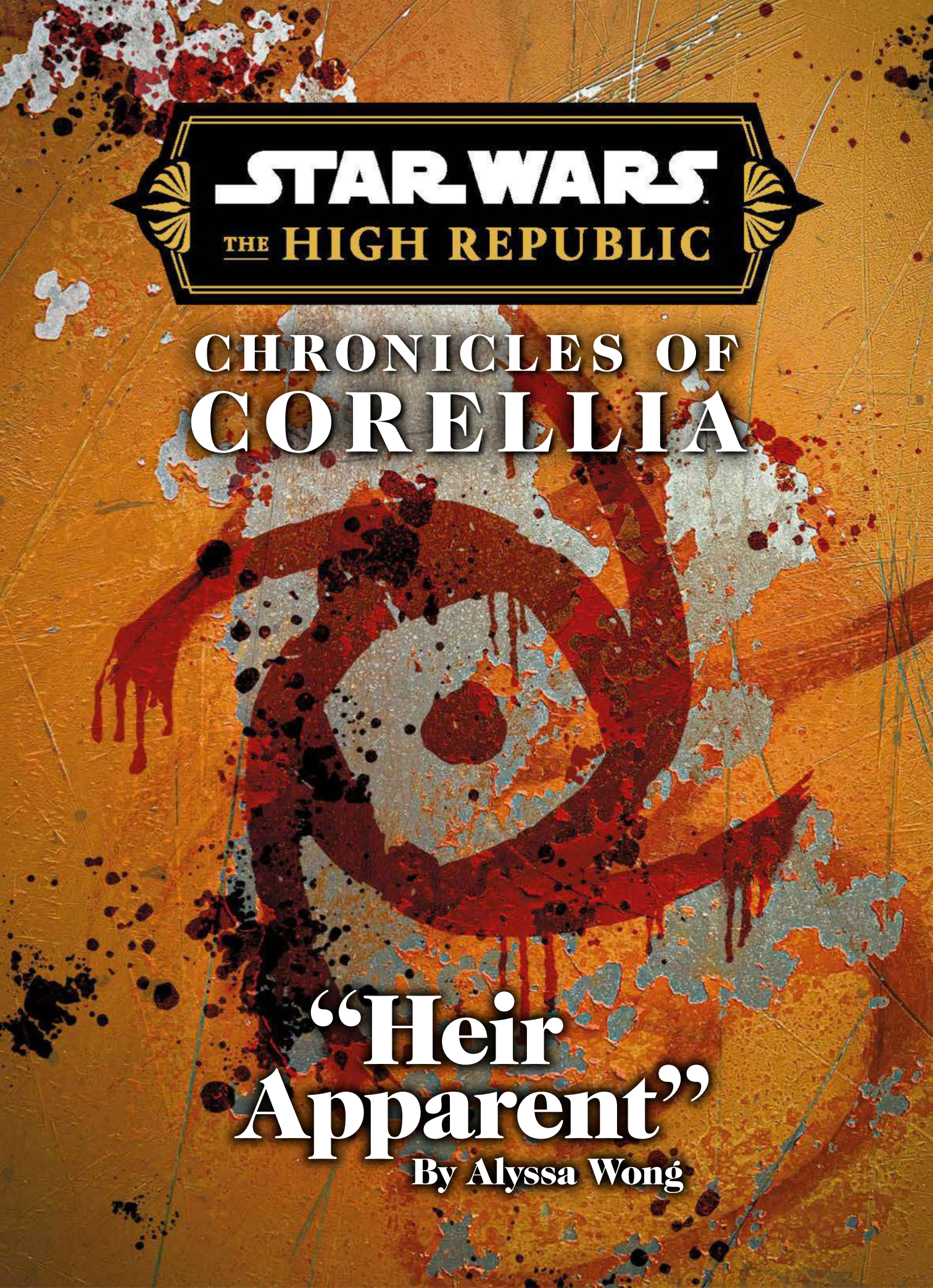


"Heir Apparent"

By Alyssa Wong

The walls of the abandoned, derelict apartment building reeked of old, stale smoke. As Krix Kamerat climbed the fire-damaged stairs, the scent grew stronger with every ascending floor. By the time he reached the highest level, five stories up, the smell was thick enough to choke on.

What was left of the structure was scorched and peeling away in chunks. Pieces of the collapsed roof littered the stairs and filthy floor. Krix picked his way around them, heading for the last apartment down the hall. He ignored the CONDEMNED BY ORDER OF CORONET CITY notice scrawled on the door and sauntered inside.

A single lantern lit the tiny, makeshift interrogation room, its faulty power cell buzzing and flickering like glowflies trapped in a bottle. Fist-sized noise-dampening devices were placed in each corner of the room. A section of the floor by the far wall had caved in, creating a vast, yawning pit that stretched all the way down to the ground level, five stories below. A Togruta man wearing Nihil gear, a patchwork of scavenged metal and leather armor, sat in a broken chair at the center of the apartment. He wasn't cuffed or bound to it.

He didn't need to be.

A teenage Lucem boy in dark clothing sat on a crate across from him, leaning close to the man and cradling the Nihil's face in his hands. He was slim and unassuming, slightly younger than Krix, and his pale, semi-translucent skin–even paler than Krix's human skin–glimmered with strange, blue-tinted iridescence. A silver-hilted lightsaber hung from his belt. A Nihil gas mask rested on his other hip. His white hair was tucked behind his ear, exposing his face. He gazed directly into the Togruta's eyes as the man twisted and sobbed.

The Nihil was a large, bulky man with a powerful build and long white-and-blue-striped lekku. But his orange skin was ashen and sickly. Sweat poured down his face, staining his shirt, and his expression was wild with terror.

"It's alright," the Lucem boy said softly. "Just tell me what I want to know and this can end."

"He won't be telling you anything like that, Ruu," Krix said, leaning against the door frame. He couldn't keep the sneer off his face. "Look at him. He's barely conscious."

Ruu's gaze flickered toward Krix, and for a dizzying, sickening moment, Krix saw what the Togruta saw: Ruu's eyes were an endless black expanse, like the cold void of space. His myriad white pupils clustered and stretched into horrible holes; they seemed to ooze beyond the confines of his lower eyelids,

A single lantern lit the tiny, makeshift interrogation room, its faulty power cell buzzing and flickering.

dripping down his cheeks like molten wax and warping the air around his face. A wave of instinctive horror, disgust, and vertigo hit Krix, and his stomach lurched violently–

And then Ruu blinked and his eyes were normal again. His white pupils were small, speckling his black sclera like stars. "Where have you been?" he asked flatly. "You're late."

"Late's a matter of opinion," Krix said. He wiped his sweaty palms discreetly on his trousers. *Those karking Lucem eye tricks.* "I walked the building's perimeter. No one else is around."

"People think this area of Coronet City is haunted," Ruu said. He rarely spoke without his boss, Crash Ongwa, or her girlfriend, Svi'no Atchapat, present, but when he did, his voice was quiet and deliberate, as if every word cost him. "A deadly fire swept through the neighborhood a few years ago. Folks say that if you listen at night, you can still hear ghosts crying."

That was why they had chosen to hold the interrogation here. Even if the noise dampeners failed, no one would think twice about strange sounds coming from the building.

"I still can't believe your boss signed off on this operation," Krix said, walking toward Ruu. The burned, rotted floorboards creaked uneasily with each step. "It's a little brutal for her taste, isn't it? I didn't think she had it in her." He smirked. "But then you never thought she'd make you work with a Nihil, did you?"

Ruu's hand twitched toward the lightsaber on his belt.

Like many Jedi Padawans, Ruu had lost his master in a battle against the Nihil. *One less Force-using abomination in the world,* Krix thought with satisfaction. It was a shame Ruu hadn't died, too. But if his master was anything like the Jedi who had stolen away Krix's beloved Zeen–

Well. That Jedi had gotten what she deserved.

"You're very lucky," Ruu said. He rose to his feet, unfolding with lethal grace. Standing face-to-face, he was a hair taller than Krix, though not as broad in the shoulders. His voice was as soft as ever. "Crash asked me not to kill you as a favor. That's the only reason you're still breathing."

"You're always so obedient to her," Krix mocked. "Some Jedi lessons are hard to shake, huh?" He nodded at the Nihil man in the chair. "Let's not get distracted and forget why we're here. You've had your chance. It's my turn."

Krix dragged another discarded chair over, flipping it backward and setting it in front of the shivering prisoner. He sat and rested his elbows on the top rail. "Hello, Haakon Pav," Krix said pleasantly. "Do you know who I am?"

"Make him stop," Haakon muttered over and over, his breath short with panic. "Make him stop, make him stop, make him stop." His eyes were glassy and he didn't seem to register Krix's presence.

Krix felt a spike of fury–how *dare* this insignificant man ignore him?–and slammed the metal toe of his boot into the Togruta's leg. There was a *krak*! and the man screamed. The pain seemed to clear his head, though, and his awareness slowly returned. "Who… where am I?"

"Not important," Krix replied, flicking a bit of ash from his chair. "I'll ask again. Do you remember me, Haakon?"

Haakon struggled to find an answer, searching Krix's face for clues: hard green eyes, freckled skin, blond hair shaved on the sides. It clicked when he spotted the long scar running up Krix's cheek. "No, it can't be. But… you're dead," Haakon gasped. Krix hummed nonchalantly. "*Commander Krix Kamerat?*"

"That's right. I'm Krix Kamerat, Marchion Ro's chosen son and right-hand man." Krix smiled, bright and cruel. He flicked out his knife. "And you are going to tell me everything I want to hear."

Three days prior, a package arrived for Krix. It was a rectangular metal crate, neatly addressed and delivered to the doorstep of Crash's shipyard hideout. It reeked in the Corellian heat, a sickly, spoiled smell that clung to everything around it.

Krix clenched his fists and glared down at the crate. He didn't open it. Neither did Crash, who was perched on a nearby pile of cargo. They both knew what was inside.

"So much for your Nihil contacts," Crash drawled, flipping her close-cropped pink hair out of her face. She was a short young human woman in a white tank top and flight suit overalls. There was a clever, piercing gleam in her dark brown eyes, drawing attention away from the sleepless shadows under them. "All of your assassins have been second-rate. Guess you don't have as much clout as you thought you did."

"Of course I do," Krix hissed. Anger boiled under his skin. Crash always thought she was so *smart*. She ran a personal security company in Coronet City and thought that made her important, instead of a jumped-up little scurrier. She never gave him the respect he deserved. One day, he would enjoy making her pay for that. "The only reason you're even here is because of my connections–"

"No, the only reason *you're* here is because of your connections," Crash said flatly. "We broke you out of that Republic prison because you promised us Marchion Ro's head. So far, all of your grandstanding has gotten us nothing but four dead Nihil assassins in boxes. If you can't deliver, we can always put you right back where we found you."

Krix had no desire to return to the prison where he'd languished after Starlight Beacon, the space station that represented the Republic and Jedi's shining hopes, was blown from the sky in a brilliant Nihil tactical assault. Krix had been aboard the doomed vessel at the time, cleverly escaping the Jedi and playing a key part in destroying the station.

That was how he preferred to remember it. The truth was smaller than that–the indignity of being captured by Zeen and the Jedi, being trapped in a cell aboard Starlight, and a desperate escape–but Krix had no use for the truth. He carefully sanded down its edges and tucked it away in his head, building something better and grander in its place. *The Legend of Krix Kamerat.* Hero of the Nihil, scourge of the Jedi, the renegade who single-handedly sent Starlight Beacon crashing down into the sea. Marchion Ro's trusted right-hand man. His chosen son. His heir.

He repeated these things to himself and to anyone who would listen, knowing that repetition cemented words into reality. Anyone could create it. But Krix wasn't just anyone–he was *special*.

After Starlight, Krix remembered waking up twice: first, on the shore of Eiram, a brief moment of lucidity before being knocked unconscious, and then again in a Republic prison. He bided his time, certain that Marchion would send his Nihil to liberate him at any moment. But weeks stretched to months with

no rescue in sight. It didn't make sense. Marchion had elevated him within the Nihil, so why hadn't he swooped in to take back his most loyal soldier? The thought chewed away at him.

By the time Crash had appeared, Krix's time in isolation had stoked his fury into obsession with Marchion's treachery and a desire for revenge. If she was wise, she would have killed him. Luckily, Crash was a fool. She thought he was one, too, and it was a part he was willing to play in order to manipulate her. Krix was happy to give her what she wanted–what they both wanted: the chance to murder Marchion Ro.

Of course, it ended up being more difficult in practice.

"Ruu," Crash said to the shadow behind her. The Lucem angled his head toward her, never taking his eyes off Krix. "Check the box?"

Ruu moved silently toward the crate. As he passed, their shoulders almost brushing, Krix felt a reflexive shudder of hatred. Every Jedi reminded him of Zeen, the Mikkian girl he'd grown up with, and her cruel betrayal. The way she hid her own Force affinity from him and joined the Jedi, discarding the values they had grown up with on Trymant IV. Discarding him.

Ruu crouched and opened the crate, peering inside. "They're in pieces," he said, his voice barely audible above the steady hum of machinery. "Just like the others. But...." He drew his lightsaber. The blue blade crackled to life, and with one swift motion, he sliced the crate's lid off. The heavy metal slab clanged to the ground. Ruu flipped it over with his boot, revealing a set of markings painted on its underside. "There's a message."

That got Crash's attention. She joined them, scanning the writing with her clever, sharp gaze. As she read, her shoulders tensed. "It's a message for you," she said, angling her chin at Krix. "From Marchion."

The message was brief, in the Eye's distinctive handwriting. Krix drew near, eagerly drinking in the words of his former mentor–the man he had spent the past several weeks trying to kill. But when he read them, his mouth flooded with hot, bitter rage.

By the time Crash had appeared, Krix's time in isolation had stoked his fury into obsession with Marchion's treachery and a desire for revenge. If she was wise, she would have killed him.

I expected more from you, Krix.

Krix snarled, grabbing the lid and hurling it across the cargo hold. "That druk-eating karker!" He whirled on Crash and Ruu, looking for a target for his rage. "He knows where I am! That I'm the mastermind of this plan! I've sent Nihil from his inner circle to kill him, and he didn't even bother to send one back!"

"Technically he did send one back," Ruu muttered. He extended his arm toward the crate lid, using the Force to lift and drag it toward him. The lid settled back over the crate as if by its own will, sealing it shut. *Unnatural.* "Marchion's aware of what we're doing. He just doesn't care. You're not worth his time."

"Shut up," Krix growled. The stench of decay was seeping into his skin. He wanted to wrap his fingers around Ruu's neck and squeeze. The impulse itched behind his teeth. "You trash are below his notice, but I'm nothing like you. Maybe you don't understand it because Jedi are too weak to form bonds." He punctuated his words with a sneer. "You'll never understand what it's like to have a family."

Ruu went unnaturally still. His dark eyes glinted behind his pale

hair. "If Marchion considered you family, he wouldn't have thrown you away and left you to rot," he said, his voice laced with contempt. "You keep calling yourself his son, but it sounds like you're barely an afterthought to him."

Krix lunged for his throat. His knuckles connected with Ruu's jaw, knocking the Lucem to the ground. Krix hit him again, each impact giving him a flash of white-hot, furious satisfaction. Then Ruu punched him in the stomach, knocking the breath from his lungs. Something wrapped around Krix's ribs, squeezing like a giant, invisible hand. Krix wheezed, his hands scrabbling at nothing as he was lifted into the air.

Ruu lay on his back, propped up on one elbow. His other hand was extended toward Krix, palm open. He curled his fingers, slowly and deliberately, and the pressure around Krix's ribs intensified. Ruu's lip was split and smeared with blue blood, and there was no mercy on his face.

"Enough!" Crash shouted. She stepped between them, grabbing Ruu's shoulder. "Put him down, Ruu!"

Awareness flooded back into Ruu's expression. The invisible pressure immediately vanished. Krix fell to the floor, gasping for air. Ruu pulled his hand back, his eyes darting toward it like he was holding a venomous snake. "Crash, I–I don't know what…." His voice trailed off. "Sorry."

"Get ahold of yourself," Crash said, keeping her voice low. Krix heard it anyway. "He's riling you up on purpose. You're better than this." Ruu nodded, gaze fixed on the ground. Crash turned toward Krix, jabbing a finger at him. "And you! I know what you're doing. If you keep antagonizing my crew, I'll kick you out of an airlock myself."

Awareness flooded back into Ruu's expression. The invisible pressure immediately vanished. Krix fell to the floor, gasping for air.

It grated on Krix, but he managed a smile that almost looked sincere. "Noted," he said.

Crash dragged her hand down her face. "This plan clearly isn't working. We'll have to find a different way to get to Marchion. The Stormwall has sealed off Republic space and trapped planets in Nihil territory behind its impenetrable borders. Only the Nihil can travel back and forth, finding a way across it is almost impossible. Corellia's on the outside and we can't reach Marchion when he passes through." She shook her head. "Krix, your Nihil contacts were already on the other side of the Stormwall, which is why we went with your plan in the first place. But even when your assassins made it onto Marchion's flagship, the Gaze Electric, well...."

They all looked at the crate.

My plan was perfect! Krix wanted to scream. *It only failed because other people were incompetent!* The assassins had been his former Nihil underlings. If they were alive, he'd kill them again for failing him.

He took a deep breath and collected himself. "You know what they say. If you want a job done right...."

"You do it yourself," Crash finished, regarding him like he was a particularly slow droid. "That is what we're trying to do here."

"No, we've been sending proxies. To kill Marchion, *we* need to go to the *Gaze Electric*." Krix spread his arms gleefully. "The Stormwall is your biggest barrier. But if we can get the coordinates, then it stops being a problem."

He'd baited the hook, and Crash bit. "We could cross it any time we wanted," she realized. "Anyone from the Republic could." It was an opportunity too good to pass up and they both knew it. Still, she cocked her head suspiciously. "Where exactly do you plan to get this information?"

"I've been out of the game for a year," Krix admitted. "But one of

my former Nihil rivals is stationed aboard the *Gaze Electric*." Possibly Krix's last living Nihil contact aboard Marchion's ship, but one would be enough. "His name is Haakon Pav. Tall Togruta, loves sabacc almost as much as he loves betting on underground fights in Coronet City. I didn't try to recruit him for our previous mission because he hates me and he'd never make it past Marchion's bodyguard, but we don't need him to fight." He grinned unpleasantly. "In fact, it's better if he doesn't."

"You really think this guy knows the Stormwall coordinates?"

"That data is logged aboard the *Gaze Electric*. Haakon knows. If he claims he doesn't, we'll help him remember." Krix caught the way Crash and Ruu exchanged trepidatious glances. "It won't be pretty," he warned. "But do you want the coordinates or not?"

Crash hesitated. Ruu shook his head, barely. "Crash.... we've done a lot of things and hunted down a lot of Nihil, but this is different. If we go through with this, you're..."

"Do it," she told Krix, setting her shoulders. "And Ruu, I'm sending you too. I wouldn't trust Krix with a grocery list, much less info this important. Keep him in line, okay?"

Ruu clearly had reservations. That was happening more often, Krix noted; he trusted Crash with his life, but Crash's decision to rescue Krix had driven a wedge between them. It was a point of contention that they never settled. Their friendship was slowly fracturing under the weight of their disagreements. It was delightful to see, and Krix slyly aimed his jabs at its fissures, cracking it open further at every opportunity. Would today be the day they fell apart?

But no. Ruu did what he was told, as always. He nodded, wiping the smear of blood from his face.

"Great!" Krix said cheerfully, sliding his fool's mask back into place. He turned away with a lazy wave. "Glad that that's settled. Haakon should be in town to gamble away his credits in three days; he's not creative, but he's consistent. We'll snatch him then."

Krix disappeared back into the hideout, abandoning the crate and leaving the mess for the others to clean up.

It was laughably easy to lure Haakon back to Coronet City. It was even easier to lure him to the back room of his favorite casino. He wasn't expecting the needle that bit into his side, injecting him with a powerful sedative. The big man's knees buckled and his eyes rolled up. He never hit the ground; two pairs of arms caught him before he collapsed on the ugly, gaudy carpet.

They'd had three days to plan. And now that they had him, they had the perfect place to take him.

"Coordinates to pass through the Stormwall?" panted Haakon. He looked feverish, slumped and straining to hold himself up in his chair. The first few times Krix had cut him, he'd tried to lurch out of the chair to attack him, but Ruu hadn't let him. He had kept him pinned to his seat with the Force until Haakon finally stopped struggling. Now the eerie Lucem slowly circled both Nihil, dipping in and out of the lantern light. "Why do you want those?"

"Because I do," Krix said. He didn't need to explain himself to Haakon. The man was a flea, insignificant. He wouldn't make it out of this room anyway. "I'll keep asking you as many times as I need to. The faster you tell me, the faster we can be done."

There was a glimmer of their old enmity in Haakon's sneer. "Shouldn't you know a path already, if you're Marchion's right-hand man?" he asked. "Or maybe..." The man was piecing together a thought with startling lucidity. He wet his lips and smirked. "He doesn't know you're alive, does he?"

The back of Krix's neck heated. "I've been undercover," he snapped.

"On a special mission from Marchion himself. You wouldn't know about it."

"I don't think it exists," Haakon said. His smile stretched too wide. He was gloating. "Marchion has a new inner circle. His Ministers. His chosen ones. But you're not among them, because he cast you aside like yesterday's trash."

Krix lashed out, slicing at Haakon. "That's not true!" he snarled. The words cut deep, baring his greatest fear: that he was replaceable. Zeen had replaced him in her affections with a Jedi girl, Lula Talisola; now Marchion had replaced him with his Ministers, giving away the position that should be rightfully his. "You don't know anything!"

The situation was spinning out of control. No matter how many shallow gashes Krix made, Haakon kept laughing at him until the apartment echoed.

But Haakon's laughter dried up when a pair of pale hands rested softly on the back of his chair. Ruu stood behind him, leaning over the Nihil so he could look down into Haakon's face. "I would like to know the path," he said. His tone could be mistaken for gentleness. Krix knew better.

Ruu tilted the man's face up as Haakon began to shake. "Won't you tell me?"

This is my interrogation! Krix thought furiously, glaring at Ruu. *My operation, my intel!* He reached out and squeezed Haakon's arm, digging his fingers into one of the uglier cuts. Haakon screamed, breaking eye contact with Ruu, his attention snapping back to Krix. There, that was better.

Ruu's attention was on him, too, his bizarre black eyes filled with cold, cold stars.

"Stop wasting my time, you little worm," Krix hissed. In that moment, he wasn't sure which of them he was speaking to. "Give me what I deserve."

Every night, Krix's thoughts turned to Zeen. His Zeen. She haunted him like the most welcome ghost. He could conjure up her luminous pink skin, her playful Mikkian head tendrils tipped with purple, her sparkling brown eyes like fine-cut amber. They had been raised under the care of the Elders of the Path. The Elders didn't believe in families, but he and Zeen had always had each other. She was his past, present, and future. Falling in love with her had been natural.

And Zeen loved him, too. Of course she did. How could she not?

The last time he'd seen her, in that cell aboard Starlight Beacon, she told him he meant nothing to her.

Krix knew better. Zeen was in denial, seduced away by that young Jedi. The Force had corrupted her and twisted her into someone he didn't recognize. She refused to see reason. Instead of abandoning the Force as was good and right, Zeen turned to the Jedi and their poisonous teachings.

She deserved to die for rejecting him. But he was merciful. With Lula gone, Zeen would fall weeping into his arms. He imagined their reunion: her beautiful eyes filled with tears as she clung to him. "I was wrong," she would sob. "Of course I love you, and only you. I'm sorry about everything. I'll never use the Force again."

(The reality of Zeen didn't bear thinking about. In his dreams, she was perfect.)

Yes, Krix thought. His triumph was assured. His enemies would perish at his hand: Lula, who had gone down in flames with Starlight Beacon; Crash, who would choke on her mocking words; Ruu, who would be a pleasure to kill; Marchion's Ministers, who had supplanted him and would be supplanted in turn. Their scorn would burn to ash with their bodies. Marchion would acknowledge Krix's ambition and cunning, embrace him, and welcome him back into the fold. Zeen would look at Krix adoringly again, and the warm weight of Marchion Ro's approval would settle across his shoulders as he ascended to his rightful place. His most trusted Minister. The future chancellor, even.

"I'm proud of you," Marchion would say, and the world would realign into the shape that Krix knew it should be.

And if he couldn't have that, he would kill them. If Marchion turned away from him again, Krix would step over his corpse. If Zeen refused to live in his perfect world, then he would cast her aside.

The Stormwall coordinates were only the first step toward his destiny. The galaxy awaited, ready to be remade in his image. It was only a matter of time before it all belonged to him.

In the end, they got what they needed.

"That was pleasant," Krix said, wiping his blade clean on the knee of Haakon's trousers. The Togruta breathed shallowly, clinging to consciousness. It was almost impressive. "I'd say *'Let's do this again,'* but there won't be a next time for you."

Krix was familiar with the way that fear sparked into adrenaline, so he was ready when Haakon made one last, desperate lunge for him. But the man stopped, frozen in midair.

Ruu held his hand out with his fingers slightly bent, his face serene, almost blank. His split lip had torn open again. The lenses of the gas mask on his belt glinted. Krix had seen him cut down Nihil before during missions with Crash, but only and always wearing that mask. He wondered if this was what Ruu looked like when he killed.

Haakon twisted in the air, caught by the Force. Ruu moved his arm and Haakon moved with it until the Nihil was dangling over the giant, yawning pit in the floor. Haakon kicked desperately, babbling in terror until his words no longer made sense. His gaze caught on the silver-hilted lightsaber at Ruu's waist. "You're a Jedi?!" the man gasped. "You–you wouldn't drop me! You're better than this!"

Ruu considered him, head cocked slightly to one side. "No," he said, his quiet voice cutting deeper than Krix could with his blade. "The Jedi are better than me."

And he let go.

The Nihil plummeted, screaming, into the pit. Ruu was already moving before they heard the man hit the ground five stories below, stepping away and using the Force to gather the noise-dampeners in a floating cluster. He dropped them one by one into a bag by the door.

Krix clicked off the lantern and tucked it under his arm. The glass was still hot. "What are you going to tell Crash about what happened tonight?"

Krix clicked off the lantern and tucked it under his arm. The glass was still hot. "What are you going to tell Crash about what happened tonight?" he asked.

Ruu paused. "We got the coordinates," he said at last, scooping up the bag. When he glanced at Krix, there was barely anything recognizable left of the Jedi he once was. Instead, Krix recognized someone else: the person who had almost crushed his ribs with the Force, who would have kept squeezing if no one had interfered. "And he was just a Nihil. She doesn't need to know anything else."

Looking into Ruu's lightless eyes, Krix knew he'd already won.

"Come on, then," Krix said, hitting the button by the door and letting it slide open with a heavy *thunk*. He didn't bother hiding his savage, triumphant grin. The mask wasn't necessary anymore. "Let's go deliver the good news."

The night was quiet. No insects sang; no windows were lit. A lone streetlamp stood watch at the corner, casting a murky halo into the gloom. As two young men left the apartment building behind, their shadows stretched onward until they merged with the dark.

NEXT ISSUE: "Chronicles of Corellia" concludes, only in ***Star Wars Insider***!

JEDI MASTER'S QUIZ

Test your knowledge of the epic third and final season of *Star Wars: The Bad Batch*'s in this issue's Clone Force 99 quiz.

Compiled by Jay Stobie

"OUR MISSION IS NOT OVER YET."

Make your stand against the Galactic Empire by answering these Bad Batch brain teasers.

THE BAD BATCH

1: Which makeshift item did Omega craft while imprisoned on Tantiss?

A/ Tooka doll
B/ Lightsaber
C/ Kalikori
D/ Blaster

2: What did Wrecker return to Crosshair after the Bad Batch was reunited?

A/ His favorite sabacc card
B/ His recipe for Mantell Mix
C/ His lucky restraining bolt
D/ His old armor

3: Unsteadiness in which limb impacted Crosshair's aim?

A/ Toe
B/ Ear
C/ Hand
D/ Ankle

4: Who was wounded when the *Marauder* exploded on Pabu?

A/ Hunter
B/ Wrecker
C/ Echo
D/ Crosshair

5: Which group did Omega eventually join as an adult?

A/ The Mining Guild
B/ The Techno Union
C/ The Rebellion
D/ The Hutt Cartel

IMPERIAL ENTANGLEMENTS

6: Who toured Tantiss just prior to Omega and Crosshair's first escape?

A/ Admiral Yularen
B/ Darth Vader
C/ Agent Kallus
D/ Emperor Palpatine

7: What type of vessel did the Empire use to invade Pabu?

A/ Medical frigate
B/ Star Destroyer
C/ Cargo ship
D/ Blockade runner

8: Where was Vice Admiral Rampart sent after his arrest?

A/ An Imperial labor camp
B/ A Gungan city
C/ A Separatist base
D/ An Ithorian resort

9: Who served as Doctor Emerie Karr's assistant in the Tantiss vault?

A/ Doctor Scalder
B/ Doctor Pershing
C/ Doctor Evazan
D/ Doctor Aphra

10: Which project received the funding that Governor Tarkin redirected from Project Necromancer?

A/ Project Nova
B/ Project Pantora
C/ Project Stardust
D/ Project Veers

FIGHTERS AND FRIENDS

11: Which creature was feared by the young clones who lived near Hemlock's abandoned lab?

A/ Serpent vine
B/ Spiral vine
C/ Slither vine
D/ Snake vine

12: What did Nala Se encourage Omega to steal for her first escape from Tantiss?

A/ Medallion
B/ Protocol droid
C/ Sith holocron
D/ Datapad

13: Who did Senator Avi Singh meet with while under Captain Rex's protection?

A/ Senator Onaconda Farr
B/ Senator Riyo Chuchi
C/ Senator Orn Free Taa
D/ Senator Bail Organa

14: What did Fennec Shand want in exchange for helping Hunter and Wrecker?

A/ Help with a bounty
B/ Tech's goggles
C/ Kaminoan records
D/ A thermal detonator

15: Why did Asajj Ventress put Omega through a series of tests?

A/ To determine her M-count
B/ To certify her flying skills
C/ To locate the location of Grand Admiral Thrawn
D/ To communicate with Count Dooku

"GIVE US A REAL CHALLENGE."

Channel Hunter's skills and track down ten terms from *The Bad Batch* Season Three below:

U	T	S	T	E	O	R	C	L	O	N	E	N	O
E	O	U	B	L	A	S	T	E	R	E	F	E	N
B	T	E	O	N	L	L	E	O	L	E	H	C	N
A	C	H	R	L	U	R	C	A	T	U	E	R	E
A	O	O	R	M	L	O	K	N	T	C	A	O	U
M	C	O	U	N	T	B	C	O	A	E	C	M	R
R	E	R	A	N	C	S	A	P	C	H	N	A	E
W	N	E	E	E	L	C	P	C	A	T	E	N	W
C	S	A	R	S	E	O	E	A	F	R	M	C	R
N	E	S	T	B	R	R	F	T	B	S	O	E	E
E	U	U	I	L	C	C	E	C	O	U	C	R	H
N	C	C	C	T	E	H	W	O	L	F	F	E	C
R	N	C	H	S	N	T	A	L	P	A	H	R	T
F	C	R	R	U	E	A	T	S	O	C	T	U	A
P	N	O	I	A	H	L	T	I	T	U	S	X	B

ANSWERS QUIZ:

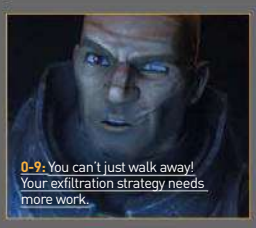
1. A, 2. D, 3. C, 4. B, 5. C, 6. D, 7. B, 8. A, 9. A, 10. C, 11. C, 12. D, 13. B, 14. A, 15. A.

"GIVE US A REAL CHALLENGE"

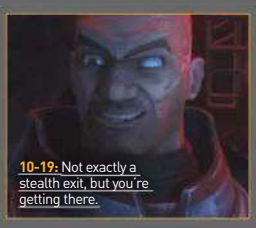
1. M-count, 2. Clone, 3. Pabu, 4. Lurca, 5. Scorch Blaster, 6. Blaster, 7. Tantiss, 8. Necromancer, 9. Batcher, 10. Wolffe.

HOW DID YOU DO?

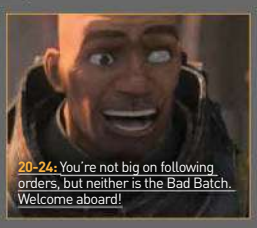
Did you complete your final *The Bad Batch* mission and answer our questions correctly?



0-9: You can't just walk away! Your exfiltration strategy needs more work.



10-19: Not exactly a stealth exit, but you're getting there.



20-24: You're not big on following orders, but neither is the Bad Batch. Welcome aboard!

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STAR WARS INSIDER

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Star Wars: The Acolyte

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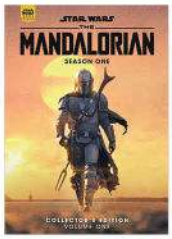

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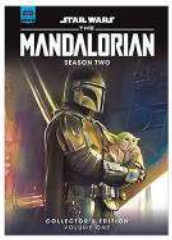

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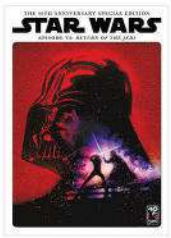

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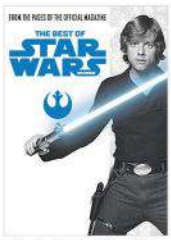

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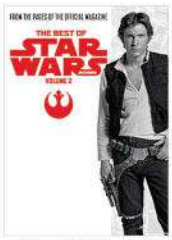

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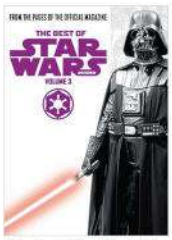

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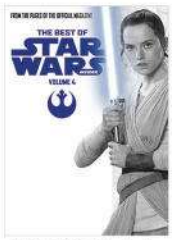

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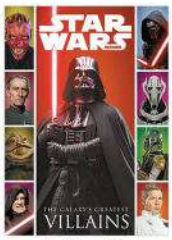

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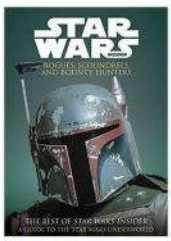

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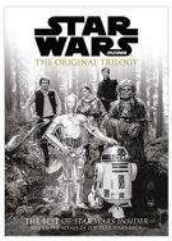

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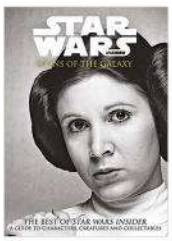

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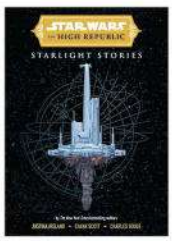

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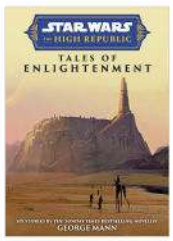

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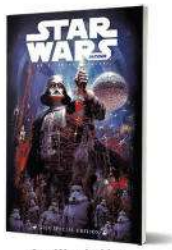

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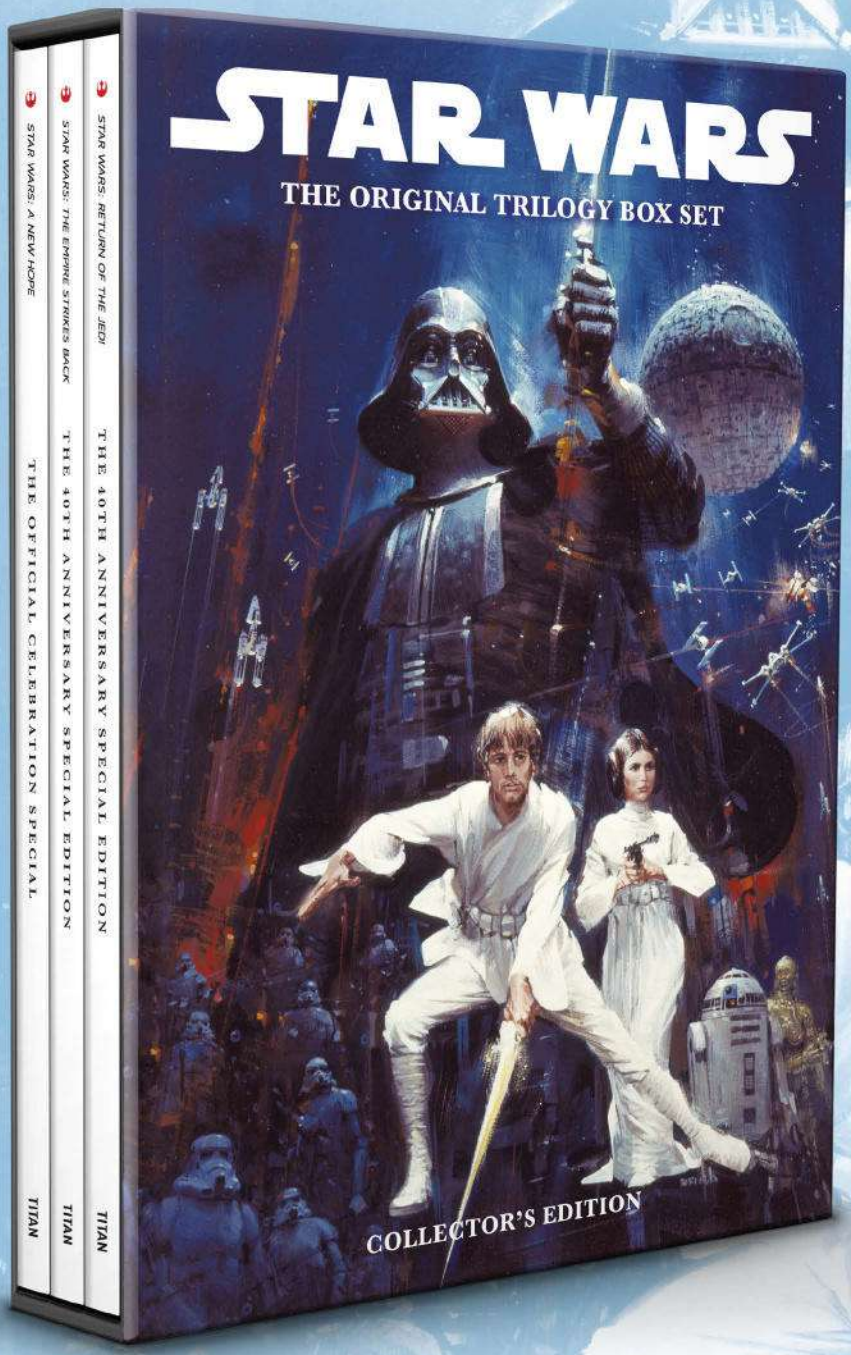

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